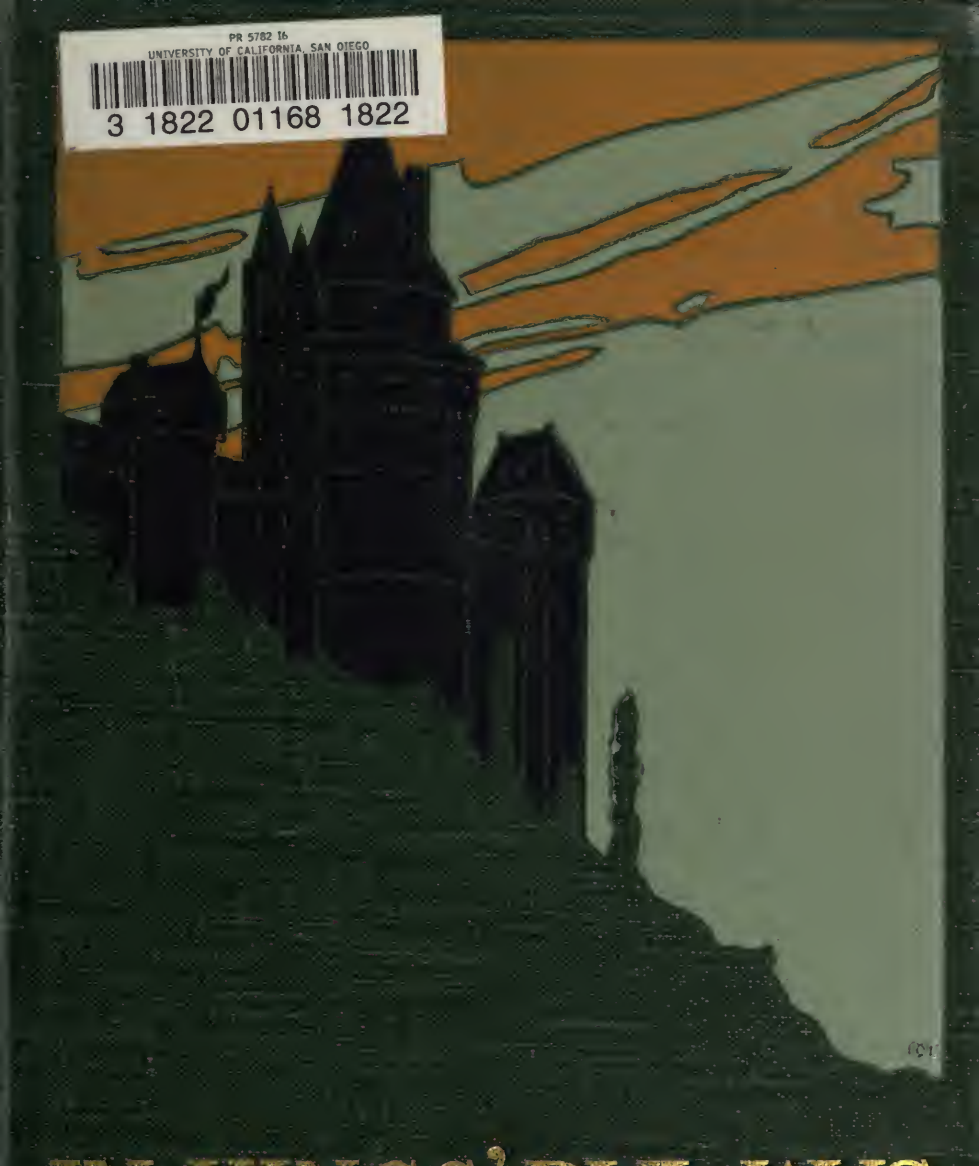
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IN KINGS' BYWAYS

by

STANLEY J. WEYMAN

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A DAUGHTER OF THE GIRONDE

Page 326

IN KINGS' BYWAYS

BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN

AUTHOR OF

"A GENTLEMAN OF FRANCE," "THE CASTLE INN," "COUNT HANNIBAL," ETC.

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CONTENTS

PART I

PAGE

FLORE, ... 1

CRILLON'S STAKE, ... 51

FOR THE CAUSE, ... 86

THE KING'S STRATAGEM, ... 131

THE HOUSE ON THE WALL, ... 152

HUNT THE OWLER, ... 177

THE TWO PAGES, ... 194

PART II

THE DIARY OF A STATESMAN

EPISODE OF THE FOWL IN THE POT, . 213

EPISODE OF THE BOXWOOD FIRE, . . 238

EPISODE OF THE SNOWBALL, . . . 266

PART III

KING TERROR

A DAUGHTER OF THE GIRONDE, . . 295

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW, . . . 329

PART I

IN KINGS' BYWAYS

FLORE

(1643)

It was about a month after my marriage—and third clerk to the most noble the Bishop of Beauvais, and even admitted on occasions to write in his presence and prepare his minutes, who should marry if I might not?—it was about a month after my marriage, I say, that the thunderbolt, to which I have referred, fell and shattered my fortunes. I rose one morning—they were firing guns for the victory of Rocroy, I remember, so that it must have been eight weeks or more after the death of the late king, and the glorious rising of the Sun of France—and who as happy as I? A summer morning, Monsieur, and bright, and I had all I wished. The river as it sparkled and rippled against the piers of the Pont Neuf far below, the wet roofs that twinkled under our garret window, were not more brilliant than my lord the Bishop's fortunes: and as is the squirrel so is the tail. Of a certainty, I was happy that morning. I thought of the little hut under the pine wood at Gabas in

Béarn, where I was born, and of my father cobbling by the unglazed window, his night-cap on his bald head, and his face plaistered where the sherd had slipped; and I puffed out my cheeks to think that I had climbed so high. High? How high might not a man climb, who had married the daughter of the Queen's under-porter, and had sometimes the ear of my lord, the Queen's minister—my lord of Beauvais in whom all men saw the coming master of France! my lord whose stately presence beamed on a world still chilled by the dead hand of Richelieu!

But that morning, that very morning, I was to learn that who climbs may fall. I went below at the usual hour; at the usual hour Monseigneur left, attended, for the Council; presently all the house was in an uproar. My lord had returned, and called for Prosper. I fancied even then that I caught something ominous in the sound of my name as it passed from lip to lip; and nervously I made all haste to the chamber. But fast as I went I did not go fast enough; one thrust me on this side, another on that. The steward cursed me as he handed me on to the head-clerk, who stormed at me; while the secretary waited for me at the door, and, seizing me by the neck, ran me into the room. "In, rascal, in!" he growled in my ear, "and I hope your skin may pay for it!"

Naturally by this time I was quaking: and Monseigneur's looks finished me. He stood in the mid-

dle of the chamber, his plump handsome face pale and sullen. And as he scowled at me, "Yes!" he said curtly, "that is the fellow. What does he say?"

"Speak!" the head-clerk cried, seizing me by the ear and twisting it until I fell on my knees. "Imbecile! But it is likely enough he did it on purpose."

"Ay, and was bribed!" said the secretary.

"He should be hung up," the steward cried, truculently, "before he does further mischief! And if my lord will give the word——"

"Silence!" the Bishop said, with a dark glance at me. "What does he plead?"

The head-clerk twisted my ear until I screamed. "Ingrate!" he cried. "Do you hear his Grace speak to you? Answer him aloud!"

"My lord," I cried piteously, "I do not know of what I am accused. And besides, I have done nothing! Nothing!"

"Nothing!" half a dozen echoed. "Nothing!" the head-clerk added brutally. "Nothing, and you add a cipher to the census of Paris! Nothing, and your lying pen led my lord to state the population to be five millions instead of five hundred thousand! Nothing, and you sent his Grace's Highness to the Council to be corrected by low clerks and people, and made a laughing-stock for the Cardinal, and——"

"Silence!" said the Bishop, fiercely. "Enough! Take him away, and——"

"Hang him!" cried the steward.

"No, fool, but have him to the courtyard, and let the grooms flog him through the gates. And have a care you," he continued, addressing me, "that I do not see your face again or it will be worse for you!"

I flung myself down and would have appealed against the sentence, but the Bishop, who had suffered at the Council and whose ears still burned, was pitiless. Before I could utter three words a dozen officious hands plucked me up and thrust me to the door. Outside worse things awaited me. A shower of kicks and cuffs and blows fell upon me; vainly struggling and shrieking, and seeking still to gain his lordship's ear, I was hustled along the passage to the courtyard, and there dragged amid jeers and laughter to the fountain, and brutally flung in. When I scrambled out, they thrust me back again and again: until, almost dead with cold and rage, I was at last permitted to escape, only to be hunted round the yard with stirrup-leathers that cut like knives, and drew a scream at every stroke. I doubled like a hare; more than once I knocked half a dozen down; but I was fast growing exhausted, when some one more prudent or less cruel than his fellows, opened the gates before me, and I darted into the street.

I was sobbing with rage and pain, dripping, ragged, and barefoot; for some saving rogue had prudently drawn off my shoes in the scuffle. It

was a wonder that I was not fallen upon and chased through the streets. Fortunately in the street opposite my lord's gates opened the mouth of a little alley. I plunged into it, and in the first dark corner dropped exhausted and lay sobbing and weeping on a heap of refuse. I who had risen so happily a few hours before! I who had climbed so high! I who had a wife new-married in my garret at home!

I do not know how long I lay there, now cursing the jealousy of the clerks, who would have flayed me to save themselves, and now the cruelty of the grooms who thought it fine sport to whip a scholar. But the first tempest of passion had spent itself, when a woman—not the first whom my plight had attracted, but the others had merely shrugged their shoulders and passed on—paused before me. "What a white skin!" she cried, making great eyes at me; and they had cut my clothes so that I was half bare to her. And then, "You are not a street-prowler. How come you here, my lad, in that guise?"

I was silent, and pretended to be sullen, being ashamed to meet her gaze.

She stood a moment staring at me curiously. Then, "Better go home," she said, shaking her head sedately, "or those who have robbed you may end by worse. I doubt not this is what comes of raking and night-work. Go home, my lad," she repeated, and went on her way.

Home! The word raised new thoughts, new hopes, new passions. I scrambled to my feet. I had a home—the Bishop might deprive me of it: but I had also a wife, from whom God only could separate me. I felt a sudden fire run through me at the thought of her, and of all I had suffered since I left her arms: and with new boldness I turned, and sore and aching as I was, I stumbled back to the place of my shame.

The steward and two or three of his underlings were standing in the gateway, and saw me approach; and began to jeer. The high grey front of Monseigneur's hotel, three sides of a square, towered up behind them; the steward in the opening sprawled his feet apart and set his hands to his stout sides, and jeered at me. "Ha! ha! Here is the lame leper from the Cour des Miracles!" he cried. "Have a care or he will give you the itch!"

"Good sir, the swill-tub is open," cried another, mocking me. "Help yourself!"

A third spat at me and bade me begone for a pig. The passers—there were always a knot of gazers opposite my lord of Beauvais' palace in those days, when we had the Queen's ear and bade fair to succeed Richelieu—stayed to stare.

"I want my goods," I said, trembling.

"Your goods!" the steward answered, swelling out his brawny chest, and smiling at me over it.

"*Your* goods, indeed! Begone, and be thankful you have escaped so well."

"Give me my things—from my room," I said stubbornly; and I tried to enter. "They are my own!"

He moved sideways so as to block the passage. "Your goods? They are Monseigneur's," he said.

"My wife, then!"

He winked, the great beast. "Your wife?" he said. "Well, true; she is not Monseigneur's. But she will do for me." And with a coarse laugh he winked again at the crowd.

At that the pent-up rage which I had so long stemmed broke out. He stood a head taller than I, and a foot wider; but with a scream I sprang at his throat, and by the very surprise of the attack and his unwieldiness, I got him down and beat his face with my fists. His fellows, as soon as they recovered from their astonishment, tore me off, showing me no mercy. But by that time I had so marked him that the blood poured down his fat cheeks. He scrambled to his feet, panting and furious, his oaths tripping over one another.

"To the Châtelet with him!" he cried, spitting out a tooth and staring at me through the mud on his face. "He shall swing for this! He tried to break in. I call you to witness he tried to break in!"

"Ay, to the Châtelet! To the Châtelet!" cried the crowd, siding with the stronger party. He

was my lord of Beauvais' steward; I was a gutter-snipe and dangerous. A dozen hands held me tightly; yet not so tightly, but that, a coach passing at that moment and driving us all to the wall, I managed by a jerk—I was desperate by this time, and savage as a wild-cat—to snatch myself loose. In a second I was speeding down the Rue Bons Enfants with the hue and cry behind me.

I have said, I was desperate. In an hour the world was changed for me. In an hour I had broken with every tradition of safe and modest and clerkly life; and from a sleek scribe was become a ragged outlaw flying through the streets. I saw the gallows, I felt the lash sink like molten lead into the quivering back, still bleeding from the stirrup-leathers: I forgot all but the danger. I lived only in my feet, and with them made superhuman efforts. Fortunately the light was failing, and in the dusk I distanced the pack by a dozen yards. I passed the corner of the Palais Royal so swiftly that the Queen's Guards, though they ran out at the alarm, were too late to intercept me. Thence I turned instinctively to the left, and with the cry of pursuit in my ears strained towards the old bridge, intending to cross to the Cité, where I knew all the lanes and byways. But the bridge was alarmed, the Châtelet seemed to yawn for me—they were just lighting the brazier in front of the gloomy pile—and doubling back,

while the air roared with shouts of warning and cries of "Stop thief! Stop thief!"—I evaded my pursuers, and sped up the narrow Rue Trousse-vache, with the hue and cry hard on my heels.

I had no plan now, no aim; only terror added wings to my feet. The end of that street gained I darted blindly down another, and yet another; with straining chest, and legs that began to fail, and always in my ears the yells that rose round me as fresh pursuers joined in the chase. Still I kept ahead, I was even gaining; with night thickening, I might hope to escape, if I could baffle those who from time to time—but in a half-hearted way, not knowing if I were armed—made an attempt to stop me or trip me up.

Suddenly turning a corner—I had gained a quiet part where blind walls lined an alley—I discovered a man running before me. At the same instant the posse in pursuit quickened their pace in a last effort; I, in answer, put forth my last strength, and in a dozen paces I came up with the man. He turned to me, our eyes met as we ran abreast; desperate myself, I read equal terror in his look, and before I could think what it might mean, he bent himself sideways as he ran, and with a singular movement flung a parcel he carried into my arms. Then wheeling abruptly he plunged into a side-lane on his left.

It was done in a moment. Instinctively I caught the burden: but the impetus with which he had

passed it to me, sent me reeling to the right, and the lane being narrow, I fell against the wall before I could steady myself. As luck would have it, that which should have destroyed me, was my salvation; I struck the wall where a door broke it, the door, lightly latched, flew open under the impact, I fell inwards. I alighted, in darkness, on my hands and knees, heard the stifled yelp of a dog, and in a second, though I could see nothing, I was up and had the door closed behind me.

Then I listened. Panting and breathless, I heard the hunt go raving through the lane, and the noise die in the distance; until only the beating of my heart broke the close silence of the darkness in which I stood. When this had lasted a minute or two, I began to peer and wonder where I was; and remembering the dog I had heard, I moved stealthily to find the latch, and escape. As I did so, the bundle, to which through all I had clung —instinctively, for I had not thought of it—moved in my arms.

I almost dropped it; then I held it from me with a swift movement of repulsion. It stirred again, it was warm. In a moment the truth flashed upon me. It was a child!

Burning hot as I had been before, the sweat rose on me at the thought. For I saw again the man's face of terror, and I guessed that he had stolen the child, and I feared the worst. He had mistaken the rabble hooting at my heels for the

avengers of blood, and had been only too thankful to rid himself of the damning fact, and escape.

And now I had it, and had as much, or more, to fear. For an instant the impulse to lay the parcel down, and glide out, and so be clear of it, was strong upon me. And that I think is what the ordinary clerk, being no hero, nor bred like a soldier to risk his life, would have done. But for one thing, I was desperate. I knew not, after this, whither to go or where to save myself. For another thing my clerk's wits were already busy, showing me how with luck I might use the occasion and avoid the risk; how with luck I might discover the parents and without suffering for the theft, restore the child. Beyond that I saw an opening vista of pardon, employment and reward.

Suddenly, the dog whined again, close to me; and that decided me. I had found the latch by this time, and warily I drew the door open. In a moment I was in the lane, looking up and down. I saw nothing to alarm me; darkness had completely fallen, no one was moving, the neighbourhood seemed to be of the quietest. I made up my mind to take the bold course: to return at all hazards to the Rue St. Honoré, seek my father-in-law at the gates of the Palais Royal—where he had the night turn—and throw the child and myself on his protection.

Without doubt it was the wisest course I could

adopt. In those days the streets of Paris, even in the district of the Louvre and Palais Royal, were ill-lighted; a network of lanes and dark courts encroached on the most fashionable parts, and favoured secret access to them, and I foresaw no great difficulty, short of the moment when I must appear in the lighted lodge and exhibit my rags. But my evil star was still above the horizon. I had scarcely reached the end of the lane; I was still hesitating there, uncertain which way to turn for the shortest course, when a babel of voices broke on my ear, lights swept round a distant corner, and I found myself threatened by a new danger. I did not wait to consider. These people, with their torches and weapons, might have naught to do with me. But my nerves were shaken, the streets of Paris were full of terrors, every corner had a gallows for me—and I turned and, fleeing back the way I had come, I made a hurried effort to find the house which had sheltered me before. Failing, in one or two trials, and seeing that the lights were steadily coming on that way, and that in a moment I must be discovered, I sprang across the way, and dived into the side-lane by which the child-stealer had vanished.

I had not taken ten steps before some object, unseen in the darkness, tripped me up, and I fell headlong on the stones. In the fall my burden rolled from my arms; instantly it was snatched

up by a dark figure, which rose as by magic beside me, and was gone into the gloom almost as quickly. I got up gasping and limping, and flung a curse after the man; but the lights already shone on the mouth of the lane in which I stood, and I had no time to lose if I would not be detected. I set off running down the passage, turned to the left at the end, and along a second lane, thence passed into another and a wider road; nor did I stop until I had left all signs and sounds of pursuit far behind me.

The place in which I came to a stand at last—too weak to run any farther—was a piece of waste land, in the northern suburbs of the city. High up on the left I could discern a light or two, piercing the gloom of the sky; and I knew they shone from the wind-mills of Montmartre. In every other direction lay darkness; desolation swept by the night wind; silence broken only by the dismal howling of far-off watch-dogs. I might have been ten miles from Paris: even as I was a thousand miles from the man who had risen so happily that morning.

For very misery I sobbed aloud. I did not know exactly where I was; nor had I known, had I the strength to return. Excitement had carried me far, but suddenly I felt the weakness of exhaustion, and sick and aching I craved only a hole in which to lie down and die. Fortunately at this moment I met the wind, and caught the scent of new-mown

hay: stumbling forward a few steps with such strength as remained, I made out a low building looming through the night. I staggered to it; I discovered that it was a shed; and entering with my hands extended, I felt the hay under my feet. With a sob of thankfulness I took two steps forward and sank down; but instead of the soft couch I expected, I fell on the angular body of a man, who with a savage curse rose and flung me off.

This at another time would have scared me to death; but I was so far gone in wretchedness that I felt no fear and little surprise. I rolled away without a word, and curling myself up at a distance of a few feet from my fellow-lodger, fell in a minute fast asleep.

When I awoke, daylight, though the sun was not up, was beginning to creep into the shed. I turned, every bone in my body ached: the weals of the stirrup-leathers smarted and burned. I remembered yesterday's doings, and groaned. Presently the hay beside me rustled, and over the shoulder of the mass against which I lay I made out the face of a man, peering curiously at me. I had not yet broken with every habit of suspicion, nor could in a moment recollect that I had nothing but rags to lose; and I gazed back spellbound. In silence which neither broke by so much as a movement we waited gazing into one another's eyes; while the light in the low-roofed hovel grew

and grew, and minute by minute brought out more clearly the other's features.

At length I knew him, and almost at the same moment he recognized me; uttering an oath of rage, he rose up as if to spring at my throat. But either because I did not recoil—being too deep-set in the hay to move—or for some other reason, he only shook his claw-like fingers at me, and held off. "Where is it, you dog?" he cried, finding his voice with an effort. "Speak, or I will have your throat slit. Speak; do you hear? What have you done with it?"

He was the man who had passed the child to me! I watched him heedfully, and after a moment's hesitation I told him that it had been taken from me, and I told him when and where.

"And you don't know the man who took it?" he screamed.

"Not from Adam," I said. "It was dark."

In his disappointment and rage, at receiving the answer, I thought again that he would fall upon me: but he only choked and swore, and then stood scowling, the picture of despair. Until, some new thought pricking him, he threw up his arms and cried out afresh. "*Oh, mon dieu,* what a fool I was!" he moaned. "What a craven I was! I had a fortune in my hands, and, fool that I was, I threw it away!"

I thought bitterly of my own case—I was not much afraid of him now, for I began to think that

I understood him. "So had I, yesterday morning," I said, "a fortune. You are in no worse case than others."

"Yesterday morning!" he exclaimed. "No, last night. Then, if you like, you had. But yesterday morning? Fortune and you, scarecrow? Go hang yourself."

He looked gloomily at me for a moment with his arms crossed on his chest, and his face darkly set. Then "Who are you?" he asked.

I told him. When he learned that the rabble that had alarmed him, had in fact been pursuing me—so that his fright had been groundless—he broke into fresh execrations: and these so violent that I began to feel a sort of contempt for him, and even plucked up spirit to tell him that look as disdainfully as he might at me, he seemed to be in no better case.

He looked at me askance at that. "Ay, as it turns out," he said grimly. "In worse case, if you please. But see the difference, idiot. You are a poor fool beaten from pillar to post; at all men's mercy, and naught to get by it; while I played for a great stake. I have lost, it is true! I have lost!" he continued, his voice rising almost to a yell, "and we are both in the gutter. But if I had won—if I had won, man——"

He did not finish the sentence but flung himself down on his face in the hay, and bit and tore it in his passion. A moment I viewed him with

contempt, and thought him a poor creature for a villain. Then the skirt of his coat, curling over as he grovelled and writhed, disclosed something that turned my thoughts into another channel. Crushed under his leather girdle was a little cape, or a garment of that kind, of velvet so lustrous that it shone in the dark place where I saw it, as the eyes shine in a toad. Nor it only: before he rolled over and hid it again, I espied embroidered on one corner of the velvet a stiff gold crown!

It was with difficulty that I repressed a cry. Cold, damp, aching, I felt the heat run through me like wine. A crown! A little purple cape! And taken beyond doubt from the infant he had stolen last night! Then last night—last night I had carried the King! I had carried the King of France in my arms.

I no longer found it hard to understand the man's terror of yesterday; or his grief and despair of this morning. He had indeed played for a great stake; he had risked torture and the wheel; death in its most horrible form. And that for which he had risked so much he had lost!—lost!

I looked at him with new eyes, and a sort of wonder: and had scarcely time to compose my face, when, the paroxysm of his fury spent, he rose, and looking at me askance, to see how I took his actions, he asked me sullenly whither I was going.

"To Monseigneur's," I said cunningly: had I

answered, "To the Palais Royal," he would have suspected me.

"To the Bishop's?"

"Where else?"

"To be beaten again?" he sneered.

I said nothing to that, but asked him whither he was going.

"God knows," he said. "God knows!"

But when I went out, he accompanied me; and we slunk silently, like the pair of night-birds we were, through lanes and alleys until we were fairly in town again. By that time the sun was up and the market people were beginning to enter the city. Here and there eyes took curious note of my disorder: and thinking of the company I was in, I trembled, and wondered that the alarm was not abroad and the bells proclaiming us from every tower. I was more than content, therefore, when my companion at the back of the Temple halted before a small door in a blind wall. Over against it stood another small door in the opposite wall.

"Do you stay here?" I said.

He swore churlishly. "What is that to you?" he said, looking up and down. "Go your way, idiot."

I was glad to affect a like ill-humour, shrugged my shoulders, and lounged on without looking back. But my brain was on fire. The King! The four-year-old King! What was I to do? To whom to go with my knowledge? And then—even then,

while I paused hesitating, I heard steps running behind me, and I turned to find him at my elbow. His face was pale, but his eyes burned with eagerness, and his whole demeanour was changed.

"Stay!" he cried panting; and then seizing me peremptorily by the breast of my shirt, "the man who tripped you up, fellow—you did not see him?"

"It was dark," I answered curtly. "I told you I did not know him from Adam."

"But had he—" he gasped, "you heard him run away—was he lame?"

I could not repress an exclamation. "*Par dieu!*" I said. "Yes, I had forgotten that. I think he was. I remember I heard his foot go cluck—clack, cluck—clack as he ran."

His face became burning red, and he staggered. If ever man was near dying from blood in his head, it was that man at that moment! But after a while he drew a long breath, and got the better of it, nodded to me, and turned away. I marked, however—for I stood a moment, watching—that he did not go back to the door at which I had left him: but after looking round once and espying me standing, he took a lane on the right and disappeared.

But I knew or thought that I knew all now; and the moment he was out of sight, I set off towards the Palais Royal like a hound let loose, heeding neither those against whom I bumped in the straiter ways, nor the danger I ran of recog-

nition, nor the miserable aspect I wore in my rags. I forgot all, save my news, even my own wretchedness; and never halted or stayed to take breath until I crept panting into the doorway of the lodge at the Palais, and met my father-in-law's look of disgust and astonishment.

He was just off the night turn, and met me on the threshold. I saw beyond him the grinning faces of the under-porters. But I had that to tell which still upheld me. I threw up my hands.

"I know where they are!" I cried breathlessly. "I can take you to them!"

He gazed at me, dumb for the moment with surprise and rage; and doubtless a less reputable son-in-law than I appeared, it would have been hard to find in all Paris. Then his passion found vent. "Pig!" he cried. "Jackal! Gutter-bird! Begone! I have heard about you! Begone! or I will have you flayed!"

"But I know where they are! I know where they have him!" I protested.

His face underwent a startling change. He stepped forward with a nimbleness wonderful in one of his bulk, and he caught me by the collar. "What," he said, "have you seen the dog?"

"The dog?" I cried. "No, but I have seen the King! I have held him in my arms! I know where he is."

He released me suddenly, and fell back a pace,

looking at me so oddly that I paused. "Say it again," he said slowly. "You have held the——"

"The King! The King!" I cried impatiently. "In these arms. Last night! I know where they have him, or at least—where the robbers are."

His double chin fell, and his fat face lost colour. "Poor devil!" he said, staring at me like one fascinated. "They have took his senses from him."

"But—" I cried, advancing, "are you not going to do anything?"

He waved me off, and retreating a step, crossed himself. "Jacques!" he said, speaking to one of the porters, but without taking his eyes off me, "move him off! Move him off; do you hear, man? He is not safe!"

"But I tell you," I cried fiercely, "they have stolen the King! They have stolen his Majesty, and I—have held him in my arms. And I know——"

"There, there, be calm," he answered. "Be calm, my lad. They have stolen the Queen's dog, that is true. But have it your own way if you like, only go. Go from here, and quickly, or it will be the worse for you; for here comes Monseigneur the Bishop to wait on her Majesty, and if he sees you, you will suffer worse things. There, make way, make way!" he continued, turning from me to the staring crowd that had assembled. "Way, for Monseigneur the Bishop of Beauvais! Make way!"

As he spoke, the Bishop in his great coach

turned heavily out of the Rue St. Honoré, and the crowd attending him eddied about the Palace entrance. I was hustled and swept out of the way, and fortunately escaping notice, found myself a few minutes later crouching in a lane that runs beside the church of St. Jacques. I was wolfing a crust of bread, which one of the men with whom I had often talked in the lodge had thrust into my hand. I ate it with tears: in all Paris, that day, was no more miserable outcast. What had become of my little wife I knew not; and I dared not show myself at the Bishop's to ask. My father-in-law, I feared, was hardened against me, and at the best thought me mad. I had no longer home or friend, and—this at the moment cut most sharply—the gorgeous hopes in which I had indulged a few moments before were as last year's snow! The King was not lost!

I crouched and shivered. In St. Antoine's, at the mouth of the lane, a man was beating a drum preparatory to publishing a notice; and presently his voice caught my attention in the middle of my lamentations. I listened, at first idly, then with my mind. "Oyez! Oyez!" he cried. "Whereas some evil person, having no fear of God or of the law before his eyes, has impudently, feloniously, and treasonably stolen from the Palais Royal, a spaniel, the property of the Queen-Regent's most excellent Majesty, this is to say, that any one—rumble—rumble—rumble"—here a passing coach

drowned some sentences—after which I caught—"five hundred crowns, the same to be paid by Monseigneur the Bishop of Beauvais, President of the Council!"

"And glad to pay it," snarled a voice, quite close to me. I started and looked up. Two men were talking at a grated window above my head. I could not see their faces.

"Yet it is a high price for a dog," the other sneered.

"But low for a queen. Yet it will buy her. And this is Richelieu's France!"

"Was!" the other said pithily. "Well, you know the proverb, my friend. 'A living dog is better than a dead lion.'"

"Ay," his companion rejoined, "but I have a fancy that *that* dog's name is spelt neither with an F for Flore—which was the whelp's name, was it not?—nor a B for Beauvais; nor a C for Condé; but with an M——"

"For Mazarin!" the other answered sharply. "Yes, if he find the dog. But Beauvais is in possession."

"Rocroy, a hit that counted for Condé shook him; you may be sure of that."

"Still he is in possession."

"So is my shoe in possession of my foot," was the keen reply. "And see—I take it off. Beauvais is tottering, I tell you; tottering. It wants but a shove, and he falls."

I heard no more, for they moved from the window into the room; but they left me a different man. It was not so much the hope of reward as the desire for vengeance that urged me; my clerk's wits returned once more, and in the very desperation of my affairs gave me the courage I sometimes lacked. I recognized that I had not to do with a King, but a dog; but that none the less that way lay revenge. And I rose up and slunk again into the main street and passed through the crowd and up the Rue St. Martin and by St. Merri, a dirty, ragged, barefoot rascal from whom people drew their skirts; yes, all that, and the light of the sun on it—all that, and yet vengeance itself in the body—the hand that should yet drag my cruel master's *fauteuil* from under him.

Once I halted, weighing the risks and whether I should take my knowledge direct to the Cardinal and let him make what use he pleased of it. But I knew nothing definite, and hardening my heart to do the work myself, I went on, until I found again the alley between the blind walls where I had left the dog-stealer. It was noon. The alley was empty, the neighbouring lane at the back of the Filles Dieu towards St. Martin's was empty. I looked this way and that and slowly went down to the door at which the man had halted in his despair; but to which, as soon as he knew that the game was not lost, he had been heedful not to return while I watched him.

There, seeing all so quiet, with the green of a tree showing here and there above the dead wall, I began to blench and wonder how I was to take the next step. And for half an hour, I dare say, I sneaked to and fro, now in sight of the door and now with my back to it; afraid to advance, and ashamed to retreat. At length I came once more through the alley, and, seeing how quiet and respectable it lay, with the upper part of a house visible at intervals above the wall, I took heart of grace and tried the door.

It was so firmly closed, that I despaired; and after looking to assure myself that the attempt had not been observed, I was going to move away, when I espied the edge of a key projecting from under the door. Still all was quiet. A stealthy glance round, and I had out the key. To draw back now was to write myself craven all my life; and with a shaking hand I thrust the wards into the lock, turned them, and in another moment stood on the other side of the door in a neat garden, speckled with sunshine and shade, and where all lay silent.

I remained a full minute, flattened against the door, staring fearfully at the high-fronted mansion that beyond the garden looked down on me with twelve great eyes. But all remained quiet, and observing that the windows were shuttered, I took courage to move, and slid under a tree and breathed again.

Still I looked and listened, fearfully, for the silence seemed to watch me; and the greenness and orderliness of the place frightened me. But nothing happened, and everything I saw went to prove that the house was empty. I grew bolder then, and sneaking from bush to bush, reached the door and with a backward glance between courage and desperation tried it.

It was locked, but I hardly noticed that; for, as my hand left the latch, from some remote part of the house came the long-drawn whine of a dog!

I stood, listening and turning hot and cold in the sunshine; and dared not touch the latch again lest others should hear the noise. Instead, I stole out of the doorway, and crept round the house and round the house again, hunting for a back entrance. I found none; but at last, goaded by the reflection that fortune would never again be so nearly within my grasp, I marked a window on the first floor, and at the side of the house; by which it seemed to me that I might enter. A mulberry-tree stood by it, and it lacked bars; and other trees veiled the spot. To be brief, in two minutes I had my knee on the sill, and, sweating with terror—for I knew that if I were taken I should hang for a thief—I forced in the casement, and dropped on the floor.

There I waited a while, listening. I was in a bare room, the door of which stood ajar. Somewhere in the bowels of the house the dog whined

again—and again; otherwise all was still—deadly still. But I had risked too much to stand now; and in the end, emboldened by the silence, I crept out and stole along a passage, seeking the way to the lower floor.

The passage was dark, and every board on which I stepped shrieked the alarm. But I felt my way to the landing at the head of the stairs, and I was about to descend, when some impulse, I know not what—perhaps a shrinking from the dark parts below, to which I was about to trust myself—moved me to open one of the shutters and peer out.

I did so, cautiously, and but a little—a few inches. I found myself looking, not into the garden through which I had passed, but into the one over the way, beyond the alley, and there on a scene so strange and yet so apropos to my thoughts, that I paused, gaping.

On a plat of grass four men were standing, two and two; between them, with nose upraised and scenting this way and that, moved a beautiful curly-haired spaniel, in colour black and tan. The eyes of all four men were riveted to the dog; which, as I looked, walked sedately first to the one pair, and then, as if dissatisfied, to the other pair; and then again stood midway and sniffed the air. The men were speaking, but I could not catch even their voices, and I was reduced to drawing what inferences I could from their appearance.

Of the two further from me, one was my rascally bed-fellow; the other was a crooked villain, almost in rags, with a leg shorter than its comrade, yet a face bold and even handsome. Of the nearer pair, who had their backs to me, the shorter, dressed in black, wore the ordinary aspect of a clerk, or confidential attendant; but when my eyes travelled to his companion, they paused. He, it was plain to me, was the chief of the party, for he alone stood covered; and though I could not see his face nor more of his figure than that he was tall, portly, and of very handsome presence, it chanced that as I looked he raised his hand to his chin, and I caught on his thumb, which was white as a woman's, the sparkle of a superb jewel.

That dazzled me, and the presence of the dog puzzled me; and I continued to watch, forgetting myself. Presently the man again raised his hand; and this time it seemed to me that an order was given, for the lame man started into action, and moved briskly across the sward towards the wall which bordered the garden on my side—and consequently towards the house in which I stood. Before he had moved far my companion of the night interposed; apparently he would have done the errand himself. But at a word he stood sulkily and let the other proceed; who when he had all but disappeared—on so little a thing my fortunes turned—below the level of the intervening

walls, looked up and caught sight of me at the window.

Apparently he gave the alarm; for in an instant the eyes of all four were on me. I hung a moment in sheer surprise, too much taken aback to retreat; then, as the lame man and his comrade sprang to the door in the wall—with the evident intention of seizing me—I flung the shutter close, and, cursing my curiosity, I fled down the stairs.

I had done better had I gone to the window by which I had entered, for all below was dark; and at the foot of the staircase, I stood, unable, in my panic, to remember the position of the door. A key grating in the lock informed me of this, but too late. On the instant the door opened, a flood of light entered, a cry warned me that I was detected. I turned to reascend, but stumbled before I had mounted six steps, and as I tried to rise, felt a weight fall on my back, and the clutch of long fingers close about my throat. I screamed, as I felt the fingers close in a grip, deadly, cold, and merciless—then in sheer terror I swooned.

When I recovered my senses, I found myself propped in a chair, and for a time sat wondering, with an aching head, where I was. In front of me a great door stood open, admitting a draught of summer air, and a flood of sunshine that fell even to my feet. Through the doorway I looked on grass and trees, and heard sparrows twitter, and

the chirp of crickets; and I found all so peaceful that my mind went no further, and it was only after some minutes that I recognized with a sharp return of terror, that turned me sick, that I was still in the hall of the empty house. That brought back other things, and with a shudder I carried my hand to my throat and tried to rise. A hand put me back, and a dry voice said in my ear, "Be easy, Monsieur Prosper, be easy. You are quite safe. But I am afraid that in our haste we have put you to some inconvenience."

I looked with a wry face at the speaker, and recognized him for one of those I had seen in the garden. He had the air of a secretary or—as he stood rubbing his smooth chin and looking down at me with a saturnine smile—of a physician. I read in his eyes something cold and not too human, yet it went no further. His manner was suave, and his voice, when he spoke again, as well calculated to reassure as his words were to surprise me.

"You are better now?" he said. "Yes, then I have to congratulate you on a strange chance. Few men, Monsieur Prosper, few men, believe me, were ever so lucky. You were lately I think in the service of Monseigneur the Bishop of Beauvais, President of her Majesty's Council?"

I fancied that a faint note of irony lurked in his words—particularly as he recited my late master's titles. I kept silence.

"And yesterday were dismissed," he continued easily, disregarding my astonishment. "Well, to-day you shall be reinstated—and rewarded. Your business here, I believe, was to recover her Majesty's dog, and earn the reward?"

I remembered that the wretch whose finger-marks were still on my throat might be within hearing, and I tried to utter a denial.

He waved it aside politely. "Just so," he said. "But I know your mind, better than you do yourself. Well, the dog is in that closet; and on two conditions it is at your service."

Amazed before, I stared at him now, in a stupor of astonishment.

"You are surprised?" he said. "Yet the case is of the simplest. We stole the dog, and now have our reasons for restoring it; but we cannot do so without incurring suspicion. You, on the other hand, who are known to the Bishop, and did not steal it, may safely restore it. I need not say that we divide the reward; that is one of the two conditions."

"And the other?" I stammered.

"That you refresh your memory as to the past," he answered lightly. "If I have the tale rightly, you saw a man convey a dog to this house, an empty house in the Montmartre Faubourg. You watched, and saw the man leave, and followed him; he took the alarm, fled, and dropped in his flight the dog's coat. I think I see it there. On

that you hurried with the coat to Monseigneur, and gave him the address of the house, and——"

"And the dog!" I exclaimed.

"No. Let Monseigneur come and find the dog for himself," he answered, smiling. "In the closet."

I felt the blood tingle through all my limbs. "But if he comes, and does not find it?" I cried.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "He will find it," he said coolly. And slightly raising his voice, he called "Flore! Flore!" For answer a dog whined behind a door, and scratched the panels, and whined again.

The stranger nodded, and his eyes sparkled as if he were pleased. "There," he said, "you have it. It is there and will be there. And I think that is all. Only keep two things in mind, my friend. For the first, a person will claim our share of the reward at the proper time: for the second, I would be careful not to tell Monseigneur the President of the Council"—again that faint note of irony—"the true story, lest a worse thing happen!" And the stranger, with a very ugly smile, touched his throat.

"I will not!" I said, shuddering. "But——?"

"But what?"

"But I may not," I said faintly—I hated the Bishop—"I may not get speech of Monseigneur. May I not then take the news to the Palais Royal and—and let the Queen know directly? Or go with it to the Cardinal?"

"No, you may not!" he said, with a look and in a tone that sent a shiver down my back. "The Cardinal? What has the Cardinal to do with it? Understand! You must do precisely that and that only which I have told you, and add not a jot nor a tittle to it!"

"I will do it," I muttered in haste. My spite against the Bishop was a small thing beside my neck. And there was the reward!

"Good! Then—then, I think that is all," he answered, seeing in my face, I think, that I was minded to be obedient. "And I may say farewell. Until we meet again, adieu, Monsieur Prosper! Adieu, and remember!" And setting on his hat with a polite gesture, he turned his back to me, went out into the sunlight, passed to the left, and vanished. I heard the garden door close with a crash, and then, silence—silence, broken only by the faint whine of the dog, as it moved in its prison.

Was I alone? I waited awhile before I dared to move; and even when I found courage to rise, I stood listening with a beating heart, expecting a footfall on the stairs or that something—I knew not what—would rush on me from the closed doors of this mysterious house. But the silence endured. The sparrows outside twittered, the cricket renewed its chirp, and at length, drawing courage from the sunlight, I moved forward and lifted the dog's coat from the floor. I examined

it: it was the one I had seen in the possession of the man in the shed. Five minutes later I was in the streets on my way to the Bishop's hotel, the parcel of velvet tucked under my girdle.

I have since thought that I did not fully appreciate at the moment the marvel that had happened to me. But by this time in truth I was nearly light-headed. I went my way as a man moves in a dream, and even when I found myself at the door of the hotel, whence I had been so cruelly ejected, I felt none of those qualms which must have shaken me had I been sensible. I did not even question how I should reach Monseigneur, or get the news to him: which proves that we often delude ourselves with vain fears, and climb obstacles where none exist. For, as it happened, he was descending from his coach when I entered the yard, and though he raised his gold-headed staff at sight of me, and in a fury bade the servants put me out, I had the passion if not the wit to wave the velvet coat in his face, and cry my errand before them all.

Heaven knows at that there was such a sudden pause and about-face as must have made even the stolen dog laugh had it been there. Monseigneur in high excitement bade them bring me in to him as soon as he was shifted, the secretary whispered in my ear that he had a cloak that would replace the one I had lost, a valet told me that my wife was gone to her father's, a serving-

man brought me food, and nudged me to remember him, while others ran and fetched me shoes and a cap; and all—all from the head-clerk, who was most insistent, downwards, would know where the dog was, and how I came to know what I did.

But I had even then the sense to keep my secret, and would tell my story only to the Bishop. He had me in, and heard it. In ten minutes he was in his coach on his way to the Montmartre Faubourg, taking me with him.

His presence and the food they had given me while I waited had sobered me somewhat; and I trembled as we went lest the man who had spared me on terms so strange had some disappointment yet in store for me, lest the closet be found empty. But a whine, that grew into a long and melancholy howl, greeted us on the threshold of the room whither I led them; and the closet door being forced, in a trice the dog was out and amongst us.

Monseigneur clapped his hands and swore freely. "*Dieu benisse!*" he cried. "It is the dog, sure enough! Here, Flore! Flore!" And as the dog jumped on us and licked his hand, he turned to me. "Lucky for you, rascal!" he cried, in great good humour. "There shall be fifty crowns in your pocket, and your desk again!"

I gasped. "But the reward, Monseigneur?" I stammered. "The five hundred crowns?"

He bent his black eyebrows. "Reward? Reward, villain?" he thundered. "Do I hear aright? Is it not enough that I spare you the gallows you richly earned but yesterday by assaulting my servant? Reward? For what do I pay you wages, do you think, except to do my work? Are you not my servant? Go and hang yourself! Or rather," he continued grimly, "stir at your peril. Look to him, Bonnivet, he is a rogue in grain; and bring him with me to the Queen's ante-chamber, Her Majesty may desire to ask him questions, and if he answer them well and handsomely, good! He shall have the fifty crowns I promised him. If not—I shall know how to deal with him."

At that, and the mean treachery of his conduct, I fell into my old rage again, and even his servants looked oddly at him, until a sharp word recalled them to their duty; on which they hustled me off with little ceremony, and the less for that which they had before showed me. While the Bishop, carrying the dog in his arms, mounted his coach and went by the Rue St. Martin and the Lombards, they hurried me by short cuts and byways to the Palais Royal, which we reached as his running footman came in sight. The approach to the gate was blocked by a great crowd of people, and for a moment I was fond enough to imagine that they had to do with our affair—and I shrank back. But the steward, with a thrust of his knee against my hip, which showed me that

he had not forgotten my assault upon him, urged me forward, and from what passed round me as we pushed through the press, I gathered that a score of captured colours had arrived from Flanders within the hour, and were about to be presented to the Queen.

The courtyard confirmed this, for in the open part of it, and much pressed upon by the curious who thronged the arcades, we found a troop of horse, plumed and dusty and travel-stained, fresh from the Flanders road. The officers who bore the trophies we overtook on the stairs near the door of the ante-chamber. Burning with resentment as I was, and strung to the last pitch of excitement, I none the less remember that I thought it an odd time to push in with a dog; but Monseigneur the Bishop did not seem to see this. Whether he took a certain pleasure in belittling the war-party, to whom he was opposed in his politics, or merely knew his ground well, he went on, thrusting the *militaires* aside with little ceremony; and as every one was as quick to give place to him, as he was to advance, in a moment we were in the ante-chamber.

I had never been admitted before, and from the doorway, where I paused in Bonnivet's keeping, I viewed the scene with an interest that for the first time overcame my sense of injustice. The long room hummed with talk; a crowd of churchmen and pages, with a sprinkling of the lesser no-

bility, many lawyers and some soldiers, filled it from end to end. In one corner were a group of tradesmen bearing plate for the Queen's inspection: in another stood a knot of suitors with petitions; while everywhere men, whose eager faces and expectant eyes were their best petitions, watched the farther door with quivering lips, or sighed when it opened, and emitted merely a councillor or a marquis. Several times a masked lady flitted through the crowd, with a bow here and the honour of her taper fingers there. The windows were open, the summer air entered; and the murmur of the throng without, mingling with the stir of talk within, seemed to add to the light and colour of the room.

My lord of Beauvais, with his chaplain and his pages at his shoulder, was making in his stately way towards the farther door, when he met M. de Chateauneuf, and paused to speak. When he escaped from him a dozen clients, whose obsequious bows rendered evasion impossible, still delayed him. And I had grown cold, and hot again, and he was but halfway on his progress up the crowded room, when the inner door opened, half a dozen voices cried "The Queen! The Queen!" and an usher with a silver wand passed down the room and ranked the company on either side—not without some struggling, and once a fierce oath, and twice a smothered outcry.

Of the bevy of ladies in attendance, only half a

dozen entered; for a few paces within the doorway the Queen-Mother stood still to receive my patron, who had advanced to meet her. It seemed to me that she was not best pleased to see him at that moment; her voice rang somewhat loud and peevish as she said, "What, my lord! Is it you? I came to receive the trophies from Rocroy, and did not expect to see you at this hour."

"I bring my own excuse, Madam," he answered, smiling and unabashed. "Have I your Majesty's leave to present it?" he continued, with a smirk and a low bow.

"I came to receive the colours," she retorted, still frowning. It seemed to me that he presumed a trifle on his favour; and either knew his ground particularly well, or was more obtuse than a clever man should have been.

For he did not blench. "I bring your Majesty something as much to your liking as the colours!" he replied.

Then I think she caught his meaning, for her proud Hapsburg face cleared wonderfully, and she clapped her hands together with a gesture of pleasure almost childish. "What!" she exclaimed. "Have you found—Flore?"

"Yes, Madam," he said, smiling gallantly. He turned. "Bonnivet!" he said.

But Bonnivet had watched his moment. Before the name fell clear of his master's lips, he was beside him, and with bent knee laid the dog tenderly

at her Majesty's feet. She uttered a cry of joy and stooped to caress it, her fair ringlets falling and hiding her face and her plump white shoulders. On that I did not see exactly what happened; for her ladies flocked round her, and all that reached me, where I stood by the door, took the form of excited cries of "Flore! Flore!" "Oh, the darling!" and the like. A few old men who stood nearest the wall and farthest from the Queen raised their eyebrows, and the officers standing with the colours by the door, wore fallen faces and glum looks; but nine-tenths of the crowd seemed to be carried away by the Queen's delight, and congratulated one another as warmly as if ten Rocroys had been won.

At that moment, while I hung in suspense, expecting each moment to be called forward, I heard a little stir at my elbow. Turning—I had advanced some way into the room—I found myself with others pushed aside to give place to a person of consequence who was entering; and I heard several voices whisper, "Mazarin!" As I looked, he came in, and pausing to speak to the foremost of the officers, gave me the opportunity—which I had never enjoyed before—of viewing him near at hand. He bore a certain likeness, to my lord of Beauvais, being tall and of a handsome and portly figure. But it was such a likeness when I looked a second time, as a jewelled lanthorn, lit within, bears to its vacant fellow. And then in a moment

it flashed upon me—though now he wore his Cardinal's robes and then had been very simply dressed—that it was he whose back I had seen, and whose dazzling thumb-ring had blinded me in the garden near the Filles Dieu.

The thought had scarcely grown to a conviction before he passed by me, apologizing almost humbly to those whom he displaced, and courteously to all; and this, and perhaps also the fact that the mass of those present belonged to my patron's party—who in the streets had the nickname of "The Importants"—so that they were not quick to make room for him, rendered his progress so slow that, my name being called and everybody hustling me forward, I came face to face with the Queen almost at the moment that he did. And so I saw—though for a while I was too much excited to understand—what passed.

Her Majesty, it seemed to me, did not look unkindly upon him. On the contrary. But my lord of Beauvais was so full of his success, and so uplifted by the presence of his many friends, that he had a mind to make the most of his triumph and even to flaunt it in his rival's face. "Ha, the Cardinal!" he cried; and before the Queen could speak, "I hope," with a bow and a simper, "that your Eminence has been as zealous in her Majesty's service as I have been."

"As zealous, assuredly," the Cardinal replied meekly. "For my zeal I can answer. But as

effective? Alas, it is not given to all to vie with your Lordship in affairs."

This answer—though I detected no smack of irony in the tone—did not seem to please the Queen. "The Bishop has done me a great service. He has recovered my dog," she said tartly.

"He is a happy man, and the happy must look to be envied," the Cardinal answered glibly. "Your Majesty's dog——"

"Your Eminence never liked Flore!" the Queen exclaimed with feeling. And she tossed her head, as I have seen quite common women do it in the street.

"You do me a very great wrong, Madam!" the Cardinal answered, with the look of a man much hurt. "If the dog were here—but it is not, I think."

"Your Eminence is for once at a loss!" the Bishop said, with a sneer; and at a word from him one of the ladies came forward, nursing the dog in her arms.

The Cardinal looked. "Umph," he said. He looked again, frowning.

I did not know then that, whether the Queen liked him or disliked him, she ever took heed of his looks; and I started when she cried pettishly—

"Well, sir, what now? What is it?"

The Cardinal pursed up his lips.

My lord the Bishop could bear it no longer.

"He will say presently," he cried, snorting with

indignation, "that it is not the dog! It is that his Eminence would say," with a sneer, "if he dared!"

His Eminence shrugged his shoulders very slightly, and turned the palms of his hands outwards. "Oh," he said, "if her Majesty is satisfied I am."

"*M'dieu!*" the Queen cried, with a spirt of anger —"what do you mean?" But she turned to the lady who held the dog, and took it from her. "It *is* the dog!" she said, her colour high. "Do you think that I do not know my own dog?" she continued. And she set the dog on its feet. She called it "Flore! Flore!" It turned to her and wagged its tail eagerly, and jumped upon her skirts, and licked her hand.

"Poor Flore!" said the Cardinal. "Flore!" It went to him.

"Certainly its name is Flore," he said: yet he continued to scan it with a puzzled eye. "It is the dog, I suppose. But it used to die at the word of command, I think?"

"What it did, it will do!" Monseigneur de Beauvais cried scornfully. "But I see that your Eminence was right in one thing you said."

The Cardinal bowed.

"That I should be envied!" the Bishop retorted, with a sneer. And he glanced round the circle. There was a slight though general titter; a great lady at the Queen's elbow laughed out.

"Flore," said the Queen, "die! Die, good dog. Do you hear, *m'dieu!* die!"

But the dog only gazed into her Majesty's face with a spaniel's soft affectionate eyes, and wagged its tail; and though she cried to it again and again, and angrily, it made no attempt to obey. On that a deep-drawn breath ran round the circle; one looked at another; and there were raised eyebrows. A score of heads were thrust forward, and some who had seemed merry enough the moment before looked grave as mutes now.

"It used to bark for France and growl for Spain," the Cardinal continued in his softest voice. "One of the charmingest things, madam, I ever saw. Perhaps if your Majesty would try——"

"France!" the Queen cried imperiously; and she stamped on the floor. "France! France!"

But the dog only retreated, cowering and dismayed. From a distance it wagged its tail pitifully.

"France!" cried the Queen, almost with passion. The dog cowered.

"I am afraid, my Lord, that it has lost its accomplishments—in your company!" the Cardinal said, a faint smile curling his lips.

The Bishop dropped a smothered oath. "It *is* the dog!" he cried vehemently.

But the Queen turned to him sharply, her face crimson.

"I do not agree with you!" she replied. "It is like the dog, but it is not the dog. And more, my Lord," she continued, with vehemence equal to his

own, "I should be glad if you would explain how you came into possession of this dog. A dog so nearly resembling my dog—and yet not my dog —could not be found in a moment nor without some foul contrivance."

"It has forgotten its tricks," the Bishop said.

"Nonsense!" the Queen retorted.

A great many faces had grown grave by this time; I have said that the room was filled for the most part with the Bishop's supporters. "At any rate I know nothing about it!" he exclaimed, wiping his brow and pointing to me. "I offered a reward, and that knave there found the dog." Between anger and discomfiture he stammered.

"One of my Lord's servants, I think," the Cardinal said easily.

"Oh!" the Queen answered, with a world of meaning; and she looked at me with eyes before which I quailed. "Is that true, fellow!" she said. "Are you in my Lord's service?"

I stammered an affirmative.

"Then I wish to hear no more," she replied haughtily. "No, my Lord. Enough!" she continued, raising her voice to drown his protestations. "I do not care to know whether you were more sinned against than sinning; or a greater fool than your creature is a knave. Pray take your animal away. Doubtless in a very short time I should have discovered the cheat for myself. I think I see a difference now. I am sure I

do. But, as it is, I am greatly indebted to his Eminence for his aid—and his sagacity."

She brought out the last word with withering emphasis, and amid profound silence. The Bishop, staggered and puzzled, but too wise to persist longer in the dog's identity, still tried desperately to utter some word of excuse; but the Queen, whose vanity had received a serious wound—since she had not at once known her own pet—cut him short with a curt and freezing dismissal, and immediately turning to the Cardinal, she requested him to introduce to her the officers who had the colours in charge.

It may be imagined how I felt, and what terrors I experienced during this struggle; since it required no great wit to infer that the Bishop, if defeated, would wreak his vengeance on me. Already a dozen who had attended my Lord of Beauvais' *levée* that morning were fawning on the Cardinal; the Queen had turned her shoulder to him; a great lady over whom he bent to hide his chagrin, talked to him indeed, but flippantly, and with eyes half closed and but part of her attention. For all these slights, and the defeat which they indicated, I foresaw that I should pay with my life: and in a panic, seeing no hope but in escaping on the instant before he took his measures, I slid back and strove to steal away through the crowd.

I reached the door in safety, and even the head

of the stairs. But there a hand gripped my shoulder, and the steward thrust a face, white with rage and dismay, into mine. "Not so fast, Master Plotter!" he hissed in my ear. "You have ruined us, but if your neck does not pay for this —if you are not lashed like a dog first and hung afterwards—I am a Spaniard! If for this I do not——"

"By the Queen's command," said a quiet voice in my other ear; and a hand fell on that shoulder also.

The steward glanced at his rival. "He is the Bishop's man!" he cried, throwing out his chest; and he gripped me again.

"And the Bishop is the Queen's!" was the curt and pithy reply; and the stranger, in whom I recognized the man who had delivered the dog's cape to me, quietly put him by. "Her Majesty has committed this person to the Cardinal's custody until inquiry be made into the truth of his story, and the persons who are guilty be ascertained. In the mean time, if you have any complaint to make you can make it to his Eminence."

After that there was no more to be said or done. The steward, baffled and bursting with rage, fell back; and the stranger, directing me by a gesture to attend him close, descended the stairs and crossing the courtyard, entered St. Honoré. I was in a maze what I was to expect from him; and overjoyed as I was at my present deliverance, had

a sneaking fear that I might be courting a worse fate in this inquiry; so grim and secretive was my guide's face, and so much did that sombre dress —which gave him somewhat of the character of an inquisitor—add to the weight of his silence. However, when he had crossed St. Honoré and entered a lane leading to the river, he halted and turned to me.

"There are twenty crowns," he said abruptly; and he placed a purse in my hand. "Take them, and do exactly as I bid you, and all will be well. At the Quai de Notre Dame you will find a market-boat starting for Rouen. Go by it, and at the Ecce Homo in the Rue St. Eloi in that city you will find your wife and a hundred crowns. Live there quietly, and in a month apply for work at the Chancery; it will be given you. The rest lies with you. I have known men," he continued, with a puzzling smile, "who started at a desk in that Chancery and, being very silent men, able to keep a secret—able to keep a secret, mark you—lived to rent one of the great farms."

I tried to find words to thank him.

"There is no need," he said. "For what you have done, it is too much. For what you have to do—rule the unruly member—it is no more than is right."

And now I agree with him. Now—though his words came true to the letter, and to-day I hold one of the great farms on a second term—I too

think that it was no more than was right. For if M. de Condé won Rocroy for his side in the field, the Cardinal on that day won a victory no less eminent at court; of which victory the check administered to M. de Beauvais—who had nothing but a good presence, and collapsing like a pricked bladder, became within a month the most discredited of men—was the first movement. Within a month the heads of the Importants—so, I have said, the Bishop's party were christened—were in prison or exiled or purchased; and all France knew that it lay in a master's hand—knew that the mantle of Richelieu, with a double portion of the royal favour, had fallen on Mazarin's shoulders. I need scarcely add that, before that fact became known to all—for such things do not become certainties in a minute—his Eminence had been happy enough to find the true Flore and restore it to her Majesty's arms.

CRILLON'S STAKE.

On a certain wet night, in the spring of the year 1587, the rain was doing its utmost to sweeten the streets of old Paris: the kennels were aflood with it, and the March wind, which caused the crowded signboards to creak and groan on their bearings, and ever and anon closed a shutter with the sound of a pistol-shot, blew the downpour in sheets into exposed doorways, and drenched to the skin the few wayfarers who were abroad. Here and there a stray dog, bent over a bone, slunk away at the approach of a roisterer's footstep; more rarely a passenger, whose sober or stealthy gait whispered of business rather than pleasure, moved cowering from street to street, under such shelter as came in his way.

About two hours before midnight, a man issued somewhat suddenly from the darkness about the head of the Pont du Change and turned the corner into the Rue de St. Jacques la Boucherie, a street which ran parallel with the Quays, about half a mile east of the Louvre. His heavy cloak concealed his figure, but he made his way in the teeth of the wind with the spring and vigour of youth; and arriving presently at a doorway, which had the air of retiring modestly under a couple of

steep dark gables, and yet was rendered conspicuous by the light which shone through the unglazed grating above it, he knocked sharply on the oak. After a short delay the door slid open of itself and the man entered. He showed none of a stranger's surprise at the invisibility of the porter, but after staying to shut the door, he advanced along a short passage, which was only partially closed at the further end by a high wooden screen. Coasting round this he entered a large low-roofed room, lighted in part by a dozen candles, in part by a fire which burned on a raised iron plate in the corner.

The air was thick with wood smoke, but the occupants of the room, a dozen men, seated, some at a long table, and some here and there in pairs, seemed able to recognize the new-comer through it, and hailed his appearance with a cry of welcome —a cry that had in it a ring of derision. One man who stood near the fire, impatiently kicking the logs with his spurred boots, turned, and seeing who it was moved towards him. "Welcome, M. de Bazan," he said briskly; "so you have come to resume our duel! I had given up hope of you."

"I am here," the new-comer answered. He spoke curtly, and as he did so he took off his horseman's cloak and laid it aside. The action disclosed a man scarcely twenty, moderately well dressed, and of slight though supple figure. His face wore

an air of determination singular in one so young, and at variance with the quick suspicious glances with which he took in the scene. He did not waste time in staring, however, but quickly and with a business-like air he seated himself at a small wooden table which stood in a warm corner of the hearth, and directly under a brace of candles. Calling for a bottle of wine, he threw a bag of coin on the table; at the same time he hitched forward his sword until the pommel of the weapon lay across his left thigh; a sinister movement which the debauched and reckless looks of some of his companions seemed to justify. The man who had addressed him took his seat opposite, and the two, making choice of a pair of dice-boxes, began to play.

They did not use the modern game of hazard, but simply cast the dice, each taking it in turn to throw, and a nick counting as a drawn battle. The two staked sums higher than were usual in the company about them, and one by one, the other gamblers forsook their tables, and came and stood round. As the game proceeded, the young stranger's face grew more and more pale, his eyes more feverish. But he played in silence. Not so his backers. A volley of oaths and exclamations almost as thick as the wood smoke that in part shrouded the game, began to follow each cast of the dice. The air, one moment still and broken only by the hollow rattle of the dice in

the box, rang the next instant with the fierce outburst of a score of voices.

The place, known as Simon's, was a gaming-house of the second class: frequented, as the shabby finery of some and the tarnished arms of others seemed to prove, by the poorer courtiers and the dubious adventurers who live upon the great. It was used in particular by the Guise faction, at this time in power; for though Henry of Valois was legal and nominal King of France, Henry of Guise, the head of the League, and the darling of Paris, imposed his will alike upon the King and the favourites. He enjoyed the substance of power; the King had no choice but to submit to his policy. In secret Henry the Third resented the position, and between his immediate servants and the arrogant followers of the Guises there was bitter enmity.

As the game proceeded, a trifle showed that the young player was either ignorant of politics, or belonged to a party rarely represented at Simon's. For some time he and his opponent had enjoyed equal luck. Then they doubled the stakes, and fortune immediately declared herself against him; with wondrous quickness his bag grew lank and thin, the pile at the other's elbow a swollen sliding heap. The perspiration began to stand on the young man's face. His hand trembled as he shook out the last coins left in the bag and shoved them forward amid a murmur half of derision half of

sympathy; for if he was a stranger from the country—that was plain, and they had recognized it at his first appearance among them three days before—at least he played bravely. His opponent, whose sallow face betrayed neither joy nor triumph, counted out an equal sum, and pushed it forward without a word. The young man took up the box, and for the first time seemed to hesitate; it could be seen that he had bitten his lip until it bled. "After you," he muttered at last, withdrawing his hand. He shrank from throwing his last throw.

"It is your turn," the other replied impassively, "but as you will." He shook the box, brought it down sharply on the table and raised it. "The Duke!" he said with an oath—he had thrown the highest possible. "Twelve is the game."

With a shiver the lad—he was little more than a lad, though in his heart, perhaps, the greatest gambler present—dashed down his box. He raised it. "The King!" he cried; "long life to him!" He had also thrown twelve. His cheek flushed a rosy red, and with a player's superstitious belief in his luck he regarded the check given to his opponent in the light of a presage of victory. They threw again, and he won by two points—nine to seven. Hurrah!

"King or Duke," the tall man answered, restraining by a look the interruption which more

than one of the bystanders seemed about to offer, "the money is yours; take it."

"Let it lie," the young man answered joyously. His eyes sparkled. When the other had pushed an equal amount into the middle of the table, he threw again, and with confidence.

Alas! his throw was a deuce and an ace. The elder player threw four and two. He swept up the pile. "Better late than never," he said. And leaning back he looked about him with a grin of satisfaction.

The young man rose. The words which had betrayed that he was not of the Duke's faction, had cost him the sympathy the spectators had before felt for him; and no one spoke. It was something that they kept silence, that they did not interfere with him. His face, pale in the light of the candles which burned beside him, was a picture of despair. Suddenly, as if he bethought him of something, he sat down again, and with a shaking hand took from his neck a slender gold chain with a pendant ornament. "Will you stake against this?" he murmured with dry lips.

"Against that, or your sword, or your body, or anything but your soul!" the other answered with a reckless laugh. He took up the chain and examined it. "I will set you thirty crowns against it!" he said.

They threw and the young man lost.

"I will stake ten crowns against your sword if

you like," the victor continued, eyeing the curiously chased pommel.

"No," the young man replied, stung by something in the elder's tone. "That I may want. But I will set my life against yours!"

A chuckle went round. "Bravo!" cried half a dozen voices. One man in the rear, whose business it was to enlist men in the Duke's guard, pressed forward, scenting a recruit.

"Your life against mine! With these?" the winner answered, holding up the dice.

"Yes, or as you please." He had not indeed meant with those: he had spoken in the soreness of defeat, intending a challenge.

The other shook his head. "No," he said, "no. No man can say that Michel Berthaud ever balked his player, but it is not a fair offer. You have lost all, my friend, and I have won all. I am rich, you are poor. 'Tis no fair stake. But I will tell you what I will do. I will set you your gold chain and seventy crowns—against your life if you like."

A roar of laughter hailed the proposal. "A hundred!" cried several, "a hundred!"

"Very well. The gold chain and a hundred. Be it so!"

"But my life?" the young man muttered, gazing at him in bewilderment. "Of what use will it be to you, M. Berthaud?"

"That is my business," was the dry answer.

"If you lose, it is forfeit to me. That is all, and the long and the short of it. To be frank, I have a service which I wish you to perform for me."

"And if I will not perform it?"

"Then I will take your word as a gentleman that you will kill yourself. Observe, however, that if I win I shall allow you a choice, my friend."

He leaned back with that, meeting with a faint smile and half-lowered eye-lids, the various looks bent on him. Some stared, some nodded secret comprehension, some laughed outright, or nudged one another and whispered. For four evenings they, the habitués of the place, had watched this play duel go on, but they had not looked for an end so abnormal as this. They had known men stake wives and mistresses, love and honour, ay, their very clothes, and go home naked through the streets; for the streets of Paris saw strange things in those days. But life? Well, even that they had seen men stake in effect, once, twice, a hundred times; but never in so many words, never on a wager as novel as this. So with an amazement which no duel, fought as was the custom in that day, three to three, or six to six, would have evoked, they gathered round the little table under the candles and waited for the issue.

The young man shivered. Then, "I accept," he said slowly. In effect he was desperate, driven to his last straits. He had lost his all, the all of a young man sent up to Paris to make his fortune,

with a horse, his sword, and a bag of crowns—the latter saved for him by a father's stern frugality, a mother's tender self-denial. A week ago he had never seen a game of chance. Then he had seen; the dice had fallen in his way, the devil of play, cursed legacy of some long-forgotten ancestor, had awoke within him, and this was the end. "I accept," he said slowly.

His opponent, still with his secretive smile, took up the caster. But a short, sturdy man, who was standing at his elbow, and who wore the colours of the Duke of Guise, intervened. "No, Michel," he said, with a good-natured glance at the young player. "Let the lad choose his bones, and throw first or last as he pleases."

"Right," said Berthaud, yawning. "It is no matter. My star is in the ascendant to-night. He will not win."

The young man took up the box, shook it, hesitated, swallowed, and threw seven!

Berthaud threw carelessly—seven!

Some shouted, some drew a deep breath, or whispered an oath. These wild spirits, who had faced death often in one form or another, were still children, and still in a new thing found a new pleasure.

"Your star may be in the ascendant," the man muttered who had intervened before, "but it—well, it twinkles, Michel."

Berthaud did not answer. The young man

made him a sign to throw. He threw again—eight.

The young man threw with a hand that scarcely dared to let the dice go. Seven! He had lost.

An outburst might have been expected, some cry of violence, of despair. It did not come. And a murmur passed round the circle. "Berthaud will recruit him," growled one. "A queer game," muttered another, and thought hard. Nor did the men go back to their tables. They waited to see what would follow, what would come of it. For the young man who had lost sat staring at the table like one in a dream; until presently his opponent reaching out a hand touched his sleeve. "Courage!" Berthaud said, a flicker of triumph in his eye, "a word with you aside. No need of despair, man. You have but to do what I ask, and you will see sixty yet."

Obedient to his gesture the young man rose, and the other drawing him aside began to talk to him in a low voice. The remaining players loitering about the deserted table could not hear what was said; but one or two by feigning to strike a sudden blow, seemed to pass on their surmises to those round them. One thing was clear. The lad objected to the proposal made, objected fiercely and with vehemence; and at last submitted only with reluctance. Submit in the end, however, he did, for after some minutes of this private talk he went to his cloak, and avoiding, as it seemed,

his fellows' eyes, put it on. Berthaud accompanied him to the door, and the winner's last words were audible. "That is all," he said; "succeed in what I impose, M. de Bazan, and I cry quits, and you shall have fifty crowns for your pains. Fail, and you will but be paying your debt. But you will not fail. Remember, half an hour after midnight. And courage!"

The young man nodded sullenly, and drawing his cloak about his throat, went through the passage to the street. The night was a little older than when he had entered, otherwise it was unchanged. The rain was still falling; the wind still buffeted the creaking shutters and the swinging sign-boards. But the man? He had entered, thinking nothing of rain or wind, thinking little even of the horse and furniture, and the good clothes made under his mother's eye, which he had sacrificed to refill his purse. The warmth of the play fever coursing through his veins had clad him in proof against cold and damp and the depression of the gloomy streets, even against the thought of home. And for the good horse, and the laced shirts and the gold braid, the luck could not run against him again! He would win all back, and the crowns to boot.

So he had thought as he went in. And now? He stood a moment in the dark, narrow chasm of a street, and looked up, letting the rain cool his brow; looked up, and, seeing a wrack of clouds

moving swiftly across the slit of stormy sky visible between the overhanging roofs, faced in a dull amazement the fact that he who now stood in the darkness, bankrupt even in life, was the same man who had entered Paris so rich in hope and youth and life a week—only a week—before. He remembered—it was an odd thing to occur to him when his thoughts should have been full of the events of the last hour—a fault of which he had been guilty down there in the country; and of which, taking advantage of a wrathful father's offer to start him in Paris, he had left the weaker sinner to bear the brunt. And it seemed to him that here was his punishment. The old grey house at home, quaint and weather-beaten, rose before him. He saw his mother's herb-garden, the great stackyard, and the dry moat, half filled with blackberry bushes, in which he had played as a boy. And on him fell a strange calm, between apathy and resignation. This, then, was his punishment. He would bear it like a man. There should be no flinching a second time, no putting the burden on others' shoulders, no self-sparing at another's cost.

He started to walk briskly in the direction of the Louvre. But when he had gained the corner of the open space in front of the palace, whence he had a view of the main gate between the two tennis courts, he halted and looked up and down as if he hesitated. A watch-fire smouldering and

sputtering in the rain was burning dully before the drawbridge; the forms of one or two men, apparently sentinels, were dimly visible about it. After standing in doubt more then a minute, Bazan glided quickly to the porch of the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and disappeared in the angle between it and the cloisters.

He had been stationary in this position for some half-hour—in what bitterness of spirit, combating what regrets and painful thoughts it is possible only to imagine—when a slight commotion took place at the gate which faced him. Two men came out in close converse, and stood a moment looking up as if speaking of the weather. They separated then, and one who even by that uncertain light could be seen to be a man of tall, spare presence, came across the open space towards the end of the Rue des Fosses, which passed beside the cloisters. He had just entered the street, when Bazan, who had been closely watching his movements, stepped from the shadow of the houses and touched his sleeve.

The tall man recoiled sharply as he turned. He laid his hand on his sword and partly drew it. "Who are you?" he said, trying in the darkness to make out the other's features.

"M. de Crillon, is it not?" the young man asked.

"Yes. And you, young sir?"

"My name is Claude de Bazan, but you do not know me. I have a word to say to you."

"You have chosen an odd time, my friend."

"Some things are always timely," the young fellow answered, the excitement under which he laboured and the occasion imparting a spice of flippancy to his tone. "I come to warn you that your life is in danger. Do not go alone, M. de Crillon, or pass this way at night! And whatever you do, walk for the future in the middle of the street!"

"For the warning I am obliged to you," the tall man answered, his voice cool and satirical, while his eyes continued to scan the other's features. "But, I say again, you have chosen a strange time to give it, young sir. Moreover, your name is new to me, and I do not know your face."

"Nor need you," said Bazan.

"Ay, but I think I need, craving your pardon," replied the tall, spare man with some sternness. "I am not wont to be scared by little things, nor will I give any man the right to say that he has frightened me with a lighted turnip."

"Will it convince you if I tell you that I came hither to kill you?" the young man cried impetuously.

"Yes, if you will say also why you did not—at least try?" Crillon answered drily.

Bazan had not meant to explain himself; he had proposed to give his warning, and to go. But on the impulse of the moment, carried away by his

excitement, he spoke, and told the story, and Crillon, after leading him aside, so that a building sheltered them from the rain, listened. He listened, who knew all the dark plans, all the scandals, all the jealousies, all the vile or frantic schemings of a court, that, half French, half Italian, mingled so grimly force and fraud. Nay, when all was told, when Bazan, passing lightly over the resolution he had formed to warn the victim instead of attacking him, came suddenly and lamely to a stop, he still for a time stood silent. At last, "And what will you do now, my friend?" he asked.

"Go back," the young man answered.

"And then?"

"Pay my debt."

The courtier swore a great oath—it was his failing—and with sudden violence he seized his companion by the arm, and hurried him into the roadway, and along the street. "To Simon's!" he muttered. "To Simon's, my friend. I know the place. I will cut that villain Berthaud's throat."

"But what shall I be the better of that?" the young man answered, somewhat bitterly. "I have none the less lost, and must pay."

Crillon stopped short, the darkness hiding alike his face and his feelings. "So!" he said slowly, "I did not think of that! No, I did not think of that. But do you mean it? What, if I kill him?"

"I have played for my life, and lost," Bazan an-

swered proudly. "I promised, and I am a gentleman."

"Pheugh!" Crillon whistled. He swore again, and stood. He was a great man, and full of expedients, but the position was novel. Yet, after a minute's thought, he had an idea. He started off again, taking Bazan's arm, and impelling him onwards, with the same haste and violence. "To Simon's! to Simon's!" he cried as before. "Courage, my friend, I will play him for you and win you: I will redeem you. After all, it is simple, absolutely simple."

"He will not play for me," the young man answered despondently. Nevertheless he suffered himself to be borne onwards. "What will you set against me?"

"Anything, everything!" his new friend cried recklessly. "Myself, if necessary. Courage, M. de Bazan, courage! What Crillon wills, Crillon does. You do not know me yet, but I have taken a fancy to you, I have!"—He swore a grisly oath. "And I will make you mine."

He gave the young man no time for further objection, but, holding him firmly by the arm, he hurried him through the streets to the door below the two gables. On this he knocked with the air of one who had been there before, and to whom all doors opened. In the momentary pause before it yielded Bazan spoke. "Will you not be in danger here?" he asked, wondering much.

"It is a Guise house? True, it is. But there is danger everywhere. No man dies more than once or before God wills it! And I am Crillon!"

The superb air with which he said this last prepared Bazan for what followed. The moment the door was opened, Crillon pushed through the doorway, and with an assured step strode down the passage. He turned the corner of the screen and stood in the room; and, calmly smiling at the group of startled, astonished faces which were turned on him, he drew off his cloak and flung it over his left arm. His height at all times made him a conspicuous figure; this night he was fresh from court. He wore black and silver, the hilt of his long sword was jewelled, the Order of the Holy Ghost glittered on his breast; and this fine array seemed to render more shabby the pretentious finery of the third-rate adventurers before him. He saluted them coolly. "It is a wet night, gentlemen," he said.

Some of those who sat farthest off had risen, and all had drawn together as sheep club at sight of the wolf. One of them answered sullenly that it was.

"You think I intrude, gentlemen?" he returned, smiling pleasantly, drinking in as homage the stir his entrance had caused. For he was vain. "I want only an old friend, M. Michel Berthaud, who is here, I think?"

"And for what do you want him?" the tall

dark player answered defiantly; he alone of those present seemed in a degree a match for the newcomer, though even his gloomy eyes fell before Crillon's easy stare. "For what do you want me?"

"To propose a little game to you," Crillon answered: and he moved down the room, apparently at his ease. "My friend here has told me of his ill-luck. He is resolved to perform his bargain. But first, M. Berthaud, I have a proposal to make to you. His life is yours. You have won it. Well, I will set you five hundred crowns against it."

The scowl on Berthaud's face did not relax. "No," he said contemptuously. "I will not play with you, M. de Crillon. Let the fool die. What is he to you?"

"Nothing, and yet I have a fancy to win him," Crillon replied lightly. "Come, I will stake a thousand crowns against him! A thousand crowns for a life! *Mon Dieu*," he added, with a whimsical glance at Bazan, "but you are dear, my friend!"

Indeed, half a score of faces shone with cupidity, and twice as many bearded lips watered. A thousand crowns! A whole thousand crowns! But to the surprise of most—a few knew their man—Berthaud shook his head.

"No," he said, "I will not play! I won his life, and I will have it."

"Fifteen hundred crowns. I will set that! Fifteen——"

"No!"

"Two thousand, then! Two thousand, man! And I will throw in my chain. It is worth five hundred more."

"No! No! No!"

"Then, say what you will play for!" the great man roared, his face swelling with rage. "Thousand devils and all tonsured! I have a mind to win his life. What will you have against it?"

"Against it?"

"Ay!"

"Yours!" said M. Berthaud, very softly.

Bazan drew in his breath—sharply: otherwise the silence was so intense that the fall of the wood-ashes from the dying fire could be heard. The immense, the boundless audacity of the proposal made some smile and some start. But none smiled so grimly as M. Michel Berthaud the challenger and none started so little as M. de Crillon, the challenged.

"A high bid!" he said, lifting his chin with something almost of humour; and then glancing round him, as a wolf might glance, if the sheep turned on him. "You ask much, M. Berthaud."

"I will ask less then," replied Berthaud, with irony. "If I win, I will give you his life. He shall go free whether you win or lose, M. de Crillon."

"That is much!" with answering irony.

"Much or little——"

"It is understood?"

"It is," Berthaud rejoined with a sarcastic bow.

"Then I accept!" Crillon cried: and with a movement so brisk that some recoiled, he sat down at the table. "I accept. Silence!" he continued, turning sharply upon Bazan, whose cry of remonstrance rang above the astonished murmur of the bystanders. "Silence, fool!" He struck the table. "It is my will. Fear nothing! I am Crillon, and I do not lose."

There was a superb self-confidence in the man, an arrogance, a courage, which more than anything else persuaded his hearers that he was in earnest, that he was not jesting with them.

"The terms are quite understood," he proceeded, grimly. "If I win, we go free, M. Berthaud. If I lose, M. de Bazan goes free, and I undertake on the honor of a nobleman to kill myself before daylight. Shall I say within six hours? I have affairs to settle!"

Probably no one in the room felt astonishment equal to that of Berthaud. A faint colour tinged his sallow cheeks; a fierce gleam of joy flashed in his eyes. But all he said was, "Yes, I am satisfied."

"Then throw!" said Crillon, and leaning forward he took a candle from a neighbouring table, and placed it beside him. "My friend," he added, speaking to Bazan with earnest gravity, "I ad-

vise you to be quiet. If you do not we shall quarrel."

His smile was as easy, his manner as unembarrassed, his voice as steady, as when he had entered the room. The old gamesters who stood round the table, and had seen, with interest indeed and some pity, but with no great emotion, a man play his last stake, saw this, saw a man stake his life for a whim, with very different feelings; with astonishment, with admiration, with a sense of inferiority that did not so much gall their pride as awaken their interest. For the moment, the man who was above death, who risked it for a fancy, a trifle, a momentary gratification, was a demigod. "Throw!" repeated Crillon, heedless and apparently unconscious of the stir round him: "Throw! but beware of that candle! Your sleeve is in it."

It was; it was singeing. Berthaud moved the candle, and as if his enemy's *sang froid* wounded him, he threw savagely, dashing down the dice on the table, and lifting the box with a gesture of defiance. He swore a frightful oath: his face was livid. He had thrown aces only.

"So!" murmured his opponent quietly. "Is that all? A thousand crowns to a hundred that I better that! Five hundred to a hundred that I double it! Will no one take me? Then I throw. Courage, my friend. I am Crillon!"

He threw; an ace and a deuce.

"I waste nothing," he said.

But few heard the words—his opponent perhaps and one or two others; for from end to end the room rang and the oaken rafters shook with a great cry of "Long live Crillon! the brave Crillon!" — a cry which rose from a score of throats. Then and onwards till the day of his death, many years later, he was known throughout France by no other name. The great king's letter to him, "Hang yourself, brave Crillon. We have fought to-day, and you were not there!" is not yet forgotten—nay, never will be forgotten—in a land where, more than in any other, the memories of the past have been swept away.

He rose from the table, bowing grandly, superbly, arrogantly. "Adieu, M. Berthaud—for the present," he said; and had he not seemed too proud to threaten, a threat might have underlain his words. "Adieu, gentlemen," he continued, throwing on his cloak. "A good night to you, and equal fortune. M. de Bazan, I will trouble you to accompany me? You have exchanged, let me tell you, one taskmaster for another."

The young man's heart was too full for words, and making no attempt to speak, or to thank his benefactor, before those who had seen the deed, he followed him from the room. Crillon did not speak or halt until they stood in the Rue des Fosses; nor even there, for after a momentary hesitation he passed through it, and led the way to the mid-

dle of the open space before the Louvre. Here he stopped, and touched his companion on the breast. "Now," he said, "we can speak with freedom, my friend. You wish to thank me? Do not. Listen to me instead. I have saved your life, ay, that have I; but I hold it at my will? Say, is it not so? Well, I, too, in my turn wish you to do something for me."

"Anything!" said the young man, passionately. The sight of the other's strange daring had stirred his untried nature to its depths. "You have but to ask and have."

"Very well," Crillon answered, gravely, "be it so. I take you at your word. Though, mind you, M. de Bazan, 'tis no light thing I ask. It is something," pausing, "from which I shrink myself."

"Then it is nothing you ask me to do," Bazan answered.

"Not so," the courtier replied, though he looked far from ill-pleased by the compliment. "Listen. To-morrow the king sups at the house of Madame de Sauves. I shall be with him. Her house is in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, two doors from the convent. Here are a hundred crowns. Dress yourself so that you may appear as one of my gentlemen, and wait near the gates till I come. Then follow me in, and at supper stand behind my chair, as the others of my suite will stand."

"And is that all?" Bazan asked in astonishment.

"No, not quite," Crillon answered dryly. "The rest I will whisper in your ear as I pass. Only do what I bid you boldly and faithfully, my friend, and afterwards, if all be well, I will not forget you."

"I am yours! Do with me as you will!" Bazan protested.

But to mortals the unknown is ever terrible; and for twenty-four hours Bazan had the unknown before him. What could that be from which Crillon himself said that he shrank—a man so brave? It could not be death, for that he had risked on the lightest, the flimsiest, the most fantastic provocation. Then what could it be? Bazan turned the question in his mind, turned it a hundred times that night, turned it a hundred times as he went about his preparations next day. Turned it and turned it, but instinctively, though no injunctions to that effect had been given him, took care to show himself as little as possible in public, and especially to shun all places where he might meet those who had been present at that strange game at Simon's.

A quarter before nine on the next evening, saw him waiting with a beating heart outside the house in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec. He formed one of a crowd of lackeys, and linkboys, citizens, apprentices, and chance passers who had been attracted to the spot by the lights and by the guards in the royal livery, who already, though

the king was not come, kept the entrance to the courtyard. Bazan pushed himself with some difficulty into the front rank, and there waited, scanning with feverish eagerness every one who entered.

Time passed, and no Crillon appeared, though presently a great shouting along the street proclaimed the approach of the Duke of Guise, and that nobleman passed slowly in, noting with a falcon's eye the faces of the bowing throng. He was a man of grand height and imperial front—a great scar seeming to make the latter more formidable—his smile a trifle supercilious, his eyes somewhat near one another; and under his glance Bazan felt for the moment small and mean. A little later, from the talk of those about him, the young man learned that the king was drawing near, and Henry's coach, surrounded by a dozen of the Forty-five, lumbered along the street. It was greeted with comparative coldness, only those who stood under the guards' eyes performing a careless salute.

Bazan was no Parisian, though for the present in Paris, and no Leaguer, though a Roman Catholic; and he forgot his present errand in the excitement of his rustic loyalty. Raising his bonnet, he cried loudly *Vive le Roi!*—cried it more than once. There were six in the coach, but Henry, whose pale meagre face with its almond eyes and scanty beard permitted no mistake, remarked the saluta-

tion and the giver, and his look cast the young man into a confusion which nearly cost him dearly; for it was only as the guards closed round the coach that he perceived Crillon sitting in the nearer boot. The moment he did see him he pushed forward among the running footmen who followed the coach, and succeeded in entering with it.

The courtyard, crowded with gentlemen, lackeys and torch-bearers, was a scene of great confusion, and Bazan had no difficulty in approaching Crillon and exchanging a sentence with him. That effected, so completely was he confounded by the order whispered in his ear, that he observed nothing more until he found himself in a long gallery, waiting with many others attached to the great men's suites, while the magnificoes themselves talked together at the upper end. By listening to the gossip round him, he learned that one dark handsome man among the latter was Alphonso d'Ornano, often called the Corsican Captain. A second was M. d'O, the Governor of Paris; a third, the Count of Soissons. But he had scarcely time to note these, or the novel and splendid scene in which he stood, before the double doors at the end of the gallery were thrown widely open, and amid a sudden hush the great courtiers passed into the supper room in which the king, the Duke of Guise, and several ladies, already stood or sat in their places, having entered by another door.

Bazan pressed in with the flock of attendant gentlemen, and seeing Crillon preparing to sit down not far from the daïs and canopy which marked the king's chair, he took his stand against the wall behind him.

If the words which Crillon had dropped into his ear had not occupied three-fourths of his thoughts, Bazan would have felt a keener admiration of the scene before him; which, as was natural, surpassed in luxury anything the country lad had ever imagined. The room, panelled and ceiled with cedar, was hung with blue velvet and lighted by a hundred tapers. The table gleamed with fine napery and gold plate, with Palissy ware and Cellini vases; and these, with the rich dresses and jewels and fair shoulders of the ladies, combined to form a beautiful interior which resounded with the babble of talk and laughter. It was hard to detect danger lurking under these things, under the silk, within the flashing, gleaming cups, behind smiling eyes; still harder to discern below these fair appearances a peril from which a Crillon shrank.

But to Bazan, as he waited with tortured nerves, these things were nothing. They were no more than fair flowers to the man who espies the coils of a snake among the blossoms. Crillon's whisper had revealed all to him—all, in one brief sentence; so that when he presently recognized Michel Berthaud standing near the upper end of the table and on the farther side of it, in attendance upon the

Duke of Guise, he felt no astonishment, but only a shrewd suspicion of the quarter from which the danger might be expected.

The king, a man of thirty-seven, so effeminate in appearance that it was hard to believe he had seen famous fields and once bidden fair to be a great Captain, was nursing a dog on his lap, the while he listened with a weary air to the whispers of the beautiful woman who sat next him. Apparently he had a niggard ear even for her witcheries, and little appetite save for the wine flask. Lassitude lived in his eyes, his long thin fingers trembled. Bazan watched him drain his goblet of wine, almost as soon as he sat down, and watched him, too, hold out the gold cup to be filled again. The task was performed by an assiduous hand, and for a moment the king poised the cup in his fingers, speaking to his neighbour the while. Then he laid it down, but his hand did not quit its neighbourhood.

The next moment the room rang with a cry of alarm and indignation, and every face was turned one way. Bazan with unparalleled audacity had stepped forward, had seized the sacred cup almost from the royal hand, and drained it!

While some sprang from their seats, two or three seized the culprit and held him fast. One more enthusiastic than the others or more keenly sensitive to the outrage of which he had been guilty, aimed a fierce blow at his breast with a poniard.

The stroke was well meant, nay, was well directed; but it was adroitly intercepted by M. de Crillon, who had been among the first to rise. With a blow of his sheathed sword he sent the dagger spinning towards the ceiling.

"Back!" he cried, in a voice of thunder, placing himself before the culprit. "Stand back, I say! I will answer to the king for all!"

He cleared a space before him with his scabbard, and a quick signal brought to his side the two guards at the nearest door, who were men of his command. These, crossing their pikes before the prisoner, secured him from immediate attack. By this time all in the room had risen save the king, who appeared less moved than any by the incident. At this point he raised his hand to procure silence.

"Is he mad?" he asked calmly. "What is it, Crillon?"

"I will satisfy your Grace," the courtier answered. But the next moment, with a sudden change of tone, he cried loudly and rapidly, "Stop that man, I beg you, d'Ornano! Stop him!"

The warning came too late. The Corsican sprang indeed to the door, but the crowd impeded him; and the man to whom Crillon referred—the same who had struck at Bazan, and who was no other than Berthaud—got to it first, slipped out and was gone from sight, before those near the entrance had recovered from their surprise.

"Follow him," Crillon cried loudly. "Seize him at all hazards! *Mort de Dieu!* He has outwitted us at last."

"His Majesty has asked, M. de Crillon," said one at the table, speaking in the haughty, imperious tone of a man who never spoke unheeded, "what is the meaning of all this? Perhaps you will kindly satisfy him."

"I will satisfy him," Crillon answered, grimly fixing his eyes on the other's handsome face. "And you, too, M. de Guise. An attempt has been made to poison my master. This young man, observing that a strange hand poured the king's wine, has saved his Majesty's life by taking the poison himself!"

Henry of Guise laughed scornfully. "A likely story!" he said.

"And in my house!" Madame de Sauves cried in the same tone. "His Majesty will not believe that I——"

"I said nothing against Madame de Sauves," Crillon answered, with firmness. "For the rest, let the king be judge. The issue is simple. If the lad go scatheless, there was no poison in that cup and I am a liar. If he suffer, then let the king say who lies!"

A close observer might have seen an uneasy expression flit across more than one face, darken more than one pair of eyes. Crillon remained on his guard facing the table, his eyes keenly vigilant.

The Count of Soissons, one of the younger Bourbons, had already stepped to the king's side and taken place by his chair, his hand on his hilt. D'Ornano, who had despatched two guards after Berthaud, openly drew his long sword and placed himself on the other side of the daïs. Nor was suspicion confined to their party. Half a dozen gentlemen had risen to their feet about the Duke of Guise, who continued to sit with folded arms, content to smile. He was aware that at the worst here in Paris he was safe; perhaps he was innocent of harm or intent.

The main effect, however, of Crillon's last words was to draw many eyes, and amongst them the king's, to the prisoner's face. Bazan was leaning against the wall, the cup still in his grasp. As they turned with a single movement towards him, his face began to grow a shade paler, a spasm moved his lips, and after the interval of a moment the cup fell from his hand to the ground. Thrusting himself with a convulsive movement from the wall, he put out his hands and groped with them as if he could no longer see; until, one of them meeting the pike of the nearest guard, he tried to support himself by this. At the same time he muttered hoarsely, "M. de Crillon, you saw it! We are—we are quits!"

He would have fallen on that, but the men caught him in their arms and held him up, amid a murmur of horror; to many brave men death in

this special form is appalling. Here and there a woman shrieked; one fainted. Meanwhile, the young man's face was becoming livid; his neck seemed to stiffen, his eyes to protrude. The king looked at him and shuddered. "Saint Denis!" he muttered, the perspiration standing on his brow, "what an escape! What an escape! Can nothing be done for him?"

"I will try, Sire," Crillon answered, abandoning for the first time his attitude of watchfulness. Drawing a small phial from his pocket, he directed one of the guards to force open the lad's teeth, and then himself poured the contents of the bottle between them.

"Good lad," he muttered to himself, "he has drained the cup. I bade him drink only half. It would have been enough. But he is young and strong. He may surmount it."

The rest looked on, some in curiosity, some in pity, some in secret apprehension. It was the Duke of Guise who put into words the thoughts of many. "Those," he said scornfully, "who find the antidote, may know the poison, M. de Crillon."

"What do you mean, Duke?" Crillon replied passionately, as he sprang to his feet. "That I was in this? That I know more than I have told of it? If so, you lie, sir; and you know it!"

"I know it?" the Duke cried, his eyes aflame, his cheeks reddening. Never had he heard such words.

"Do you dare to insinuate—that I know more of this plot than yourself—if plot there be?"

"Enough!" said the king, rising in great haste, and with a face which betrayed his emotion. "Silence, gentlemen! silence! And you, my cousin, not another word, I command you! Who poured out the wine?"

"A villain called Berthaud," Crillon answered promptly and fiercely, "who was in attendance upon the Duke of Guise."

"He was not in attendance on me!" the duke answered, with spirit.

"Then on Madame de Sauves."

"I know nothing of him!" cried that lady, hysterically. "I never spoke to the man in my life. I do not know him!"

"Enough!" the king said with decision; but the gloom on his brow grew darker. "Enough. Until Berthaud is found, let no more be said. Cousin," he continued to the Count of Soissons, "you will see us home. D'Ornano, we return at once, and you will accompany us. For M. de Crillon, we commit to him the care of this young man, to whom we appear to be indebted, and whose thought for us we shall not forget. Madame, I kiss your hand."

Guise's salutation he acknowledged only by a grave bow. The last of the Valois could at times exert himself, could at times play again the hero of Jarnac and Montcontour, could even assume a

dignity no whit less than that of Guise. As he retired all bowed low to him, and the greater part of the assemblage—even those who had not attended him to the house—left in his train. In three minutes Crillon, a couple of inferior officers, and a handful of guards alone remained round the young man.

"He will recover," Crillon said, speaking to the officer next him. "He is young, and they did not dare to make the dose too strong. We shall not, however, convict any one now, unless Berthaud speaks."

"Berthaud is dead."

"What?"

"As dead as Clovis," the lieutenant repeated calmly. "He is lying in the passage, M. de Crillon."

"Who killed him?" cried Crillon, leaping up in a rage. "Who dared to kill him? Not those fools of guards when they knew it was his evidence we wanted."

"No, no," said the other coolly. "They found him dead not twenty paces from the house. He was a doomed man when he passed through the door. You understand, M. de Crillon? He knew too much to live."

"*Mort de Dieu!*" cried Crillon, raising his hands in admiration. "How clever they are! Not a thing forgotten! Well, I will to the king and tell him. It will put him on his guard. If I had not

contrived to try the draught there and then, I could not have convinced him; and if I had not by a lucky hazard won this young man last night, I might have whistled for one to try it! But I must go."

Yet he lingered a minute to see how the lad progressed. The convulsions which had for a time racked Bazan's vigorous frame had ceased, and a profuse perspiration was breaking out on his brow.

"Yes, he will recover," said Crillon again, and with greater confidence.

As if the words had reached Bazan's brain, he opened his eyes.

"I did it!" he muttered. "I did it. We are quits, M. de Crillon!"

"Not so!" cried the other, stooping impetuously and embracing him. "Not quits! The balance is against me now, but I will redress it. Be easy; your fortune is made, M. de Bazan. While James Berthon de Crillon lives you shall not lack a friend!"

He kept his word. There can be little doubt that the Laurence de Bazan who held high office under the Minister Sully, and in particular rose to be Deputy Superintendent of the Finances in Guienne, was our young Bazan. This being so, it is clear that he outlived by many years his patron: for Crillon, "le brave Crillon," whose whim it was to dare greatly, and on small occasion,

died early in the seventeenth century—in his bed—and lies under a famous stone in the Cathedral of Avignon. Whereas we find Bazan still flourishing, and a person of consequence at Court, when Richelieu came to the height of his power. Nevertheless on him there remains no stone; only some sketch of the above, and a crabbed note at the foot of a dusty page in a dark library.

FOR THE CAUSE

I

Paris had never seemed to the eye more peaceful than on a certain November evening in the year 1591: and this although many a one within its walls resented the fineness of the night as a mockery, as a scoff alike at the pain of some and the fury of others.

The moonlight fell on roofs and towers, on the bare open space of the Place de Grève, and the dark mass of the Louvre, and only here and there pierced, by chance, a narrow lane, to gleam on some foul secret of the kennel. The Seine lay a silvery loop about the Ile de la Cité—a loop cut on this side and that by the black shadows of the Pont au Change, and the Petit Pont, and broken again westward by the outline of the New Bridge, which was then in building.

The city itself lay in profound quiet in the depth of the shadow. From time to time at one of the gates, or in the vaulted lodge of the Châtelet, a sentinel challenged or an officer spoke. But the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, which had rung through hours of the past day, was silent. The tumult which had leaped like flame from street to

street had subsided. Peaceful men breathed again in their houses, and women, if they still cowered by the hearth, no longer laid trembling fingers on their ears. For a time the red fury was over: and in the narrow channels, where at noon the mob had seethed and roared, scarcely a stray wayfarer could now be found.

A few however were abroad: and of these some, who chanced to be threading the network of streets between the Châtelet and the Louvre, heard behind them the footsteps of one in great haste. Turning, they saw pass by them a youth, wearing a sword and a student's short cloak and cap—apparently he was a member of the University. He was pale of face, and for his part looked neither to right nor left: saw not one of them, and seemed bent only on getting forward.

He slackened his pace however near the corner of the Rue de Tirchape, where it shoots out of the Rue de Béthisy; and then turning the corner impulsively, he caught his foot in some obstacle, and, plunging forward, would have fallen, if he had not come against a man, who seemed to be standing still in the shadow of the corner house.

"Hold up!" exclaimed this person, withstanding the shock better than could have been expected, for he was neither tall nor bulky. "You should have a pretty mistress, young man, if you go to her at this pace!"

The student did not answer—did not seem to

hear. He staggered against the wall, and stood propping himself up by it. His face, pale before, was ghastly, as he glared, horror-struck, at something beyond the speaker. The latter, after muttering angrily, "What the plague, then, do you go dashing about the streets like a Shrove Tuesday ox for?" turned also and glanced behind him.

But not at that to which the student's eyes were directed. The stranger seemed constrained to look first and by preference at the long, low casement of a house nearly opposite them. This window was on the first floor, and projected somewhat over the roadway. There seemed to be no light in the room within; but the moonlight reached it, and showed a woman's head bent on the sill—a girl's head, if one might judge from its wealth of hair. One white wrist gleamed amid the coil, but her face was hidden on her arms and showed not. In the whole scene—in the casement open at this inclement time, in the girl's attitude, in her abandonment, there was something which stirred the nerves. It was only after a long look that the stranger averted his eyes, and cast a casual glance at a queer, dark object, which a few paces away swung above the street, dimly outlined against the sky. It was clear that it was that which had fascinated his companion.

"Umph!" he ejaculated in the tone of a man who should say "Is that all?" And he turned to the youth again. "You seem taken aback, young

man?" he said. "Surely that is no such strange sight in Paris nowadays. What with Leaguers hanging Politiques, and Politiques hanging Leaguers, and both burning Huguenots, I thought a dead man was no longer a bogey to frighten children with!"

"Hush, sir, in Heaven's name!" the young man exclaimed, shuddering at his words. And then, with a gesture of despair, "He was my father!"

The stranger whistled. "He was your father, was he!" he replied more gently. "I dare swear too that he was an honest man, since the Sixteen have done this. There, steady, my friend. These are no times for weeping. Be thankful that Le Clerc and his crew have spared your home, and your—your sister. That is rare clemency in these days, and Heaven only knows how long it may last. You wear a sword? Then shed no tears to rust it. Time enough to weep, man, when there is blood to be washed from the blade."

"You speak boldly," said the youth, checking his emotion somewhat, "but had they hung your father before his own door——"

"Good man," said the stranger with a coolness that bordered on the cynical, "he has been dead these twenty years."

"Then your mother?" the student suggested with the feeble persistence by which weak minds show their consciousness of contact with stronger ones, "you had then——"

"Hung them all as high as Haman!"

"Ay, but suppose there were among them some you could not hang," objected the youth, in a lower tone, while he eyed his companion narrowly, "some of the clergy, you understand?"

"They had swung—though they had all been Popes of Rome," was the blunt answer.

The young man shook his head, and drew off a pace. He scanned the stranger curiously, keeping his back turned to the corpse the while; but he failed by that light to make out much one way or the other. Scarcely a moment too was allowed him before the murmur of voices and the clash of weapons at the farther end of the street interrupted him. "The watch are coming," he said roughly.

"You are right," his companion assented, "and the sooner we are within doors the better."

It was noticeable that throughout their talk which had lasted some minutes no sign of life had appeared in any of the neighbouring houses. Scarce a light shone from doorway or window though it was as yet but nine o'clock. In truth fear of the Sixteen and of the mob whom they guided was overpowering Paris—was a terror crushing out men's lives. While the provinces of France were divided between two opinions, and half of them owned the Huguenot Henry the Fourth—now for two years the rightful sovereign —Paris would have none of him. The fierce

bigotry of the lower classes, the presence of some thousands of Spanish soldiers, and the ambition and talents of the Guise family combined at once to keep the gates of Paris closed to him, and to overawe such of the respectable citizens as from religious sympathy in rare cases, more often out of a desire to see the re-establishment of law and order, would have adopted his cause. The Politiques, or moderate party, who were indifferent about religion as such, but believed that a strong government could be formed only by a Romanist king, were almost non-existent in Paris. And the events of the past day, the murder of three magistrates and several lower officials—among them poor M. Portail, whose body now decorated the Rue de Tirchape—had not reassured the municipal mind. No wonder that men put out their lights early, and were loth to go to their windows, when they might see a few feet from the casement the swollen features of a harmless, honest man, but yesterday going to and from his work like other men.

Young Portail stole to the door of the house and knocked hurriedly. As he did so, he looked, with something like a shiver of apprehension, at the window above his head. But the girl neither moved nor spoke, nor betrayed any consciousness of his presence. She might have been dead. It was a young man, about his own age or a little older, who, after reconnoitring him from above,

cautiously drew back the door. "Whom have you with you?" he whispered, holding it ajar, and letting the end of a stout club be seen.

"No one," Portail replied in the same cautious tone. And he would have entered without more ado, and closed the door behind him had not his late companion, who had followed him across the street like his shadow, set his foot against it. "Nay, but you are forgetting me," he said good-humouredly.

"Go your way! we have enough to do to protect ourselves," cried Portail, brusquely.

"The more need of me," was the careless answer.

The watch were now but a few houses away, and the stranger seemed determined. He could scarcely be kept out without a disturbance. With an angry oath Felix Portail held the door for him to enter; and closed it softly behind him. Then for a minute or so the three stood silent in the darkness of the damp-smelling passage, while with a murmur of voices and clash of weapons, and a ruddy glimmer piercing crack and keyhole, the guard swept by.

"Have you a light?" Felix murmured, as the noise began to die away.

"In the back room," replied the young man who had admitted them. He seemed to be a clerk or confidential servant. "But your sister," he continued, "is distraught. She has sat at the window all day as you see her now—sometimes

looking at *it*. Oh, Felix," in a voice shaken by tears, "this has been a dreadful day for this house!"

The young Portail assented by a groan. "And Susanne?" he asked.

"Is with Mistress Marie, terrified almost to death, poor child. She has been crouching all day beside her, hiding her face in her gown. But where were you?"

"At the Sorbonne," Felix replied, in a whisper.

"Ah!" the other exclaimed, something of hidden meaning in his tone. "I would not tell her that, if I were you. I feared it was so. But let us go upstairs."

They went up; the stranger following, with more than one stumble by the way. At the head of the staircase the clerk opened a door and preceded them into a low-roofed panelled room, plainly but solidly furnished, and lighted by a small hanging lamp of silver. A round oak table on six curiously turned legs stood in the middle, and on it some food was laid. A high-backed chair, before which a sheep-skin rug was spread, and two or three stools, made up, with a great oak chest, the furniture of the room.

The stranger turned from scrutinizing his surroundings, and stood at gaze. Another door had opened silently; he saw framed in the doorway and relieved by the lamplight against the darkness of the outer room the face and figure of a tall

girl; doubtless the one whom he had seen at the window. A moment she stood pointing at them with her hand, her face white—and whiter in seeming by reason of the black hair which fell round it; her eyes were dilated, the neckband of her dark red gown was torn open that she might have air. "A Provençal!" the intruder murmured to himself. "Beautiful and a tigress."

At any rate, for the moment, beside herself. "So you have come at last!" she said, panting, glaring at Felix with scorn, passionate scorn in word and gesture. "Where were you while these slaves of yours did your bidding? At the Sorbonne with the black crows! Thinking out fresh work for them? Or dallying with your Normandy sweetheart?"

"Hush!" he said, lowering his eyes, and visibly quailing before her. "There is a stranger here."

"There have been many strangers here today!" she retorted with undiminished bitterness. "Hush, you say? Nay, but I will not be silent for you, for any! They may tear me limb from limb, but I will accuse them of this murder before God's throne. Coward! Parricide! Do you think I will ask mercy from them? Come, look on your work! See what the League have done—your holy League!—while you sat plotting with the black crows!"

She pointed into the dark room behind her, and the movement disclosed a younger girl clinging to

her skirts, and weeping silently. "Come here, Susanne," Felix said; he had turned pale and red and shifted from one foot to another, under the lash of the elder girl's scorn. "Your sister is not herself. You do no good, Marie, staying in there. See, you are both trembling with cold."

"With cold?" was the fierce rejoinder. "Then do you warm yourselves! Sit down and eat and drink and be comfortable and forget him! But I will not eat nor drink while he hangs there! Shame, Felix Portail! Shame! Have you arms and hands, and will let your father hang before his own door?"

Her voice rang shrill to the last word audible far down the street; that said, an awkward silence fell on the room. The stranger nodded twice, almost as if he said, "Bravo!—Bravo." The two men of the house cast doubtful glances at one another. At length the clerk spoke. "It is impossible, mistress," he said gently. "Were he touched, the mob would wreck the house to-morrow."

"A little bird whispered to me as I came through the streets,"—it was the stranger who spoke—"that Mayenne and his riders would be in town to-morrow. Then it seems to me that our friends of the Sorbonne will not have matters altogether their own way—to wreck or to spare!"

The Sorbonne was the Theological College of Paris; at this time it was the headquarters of the extreme Leaguers and the Sixteen. Mayenne and

D'Aumale, the Guise princes, more than once found it necessary to check the excesses of the party.

Marie Portail looked for the first time at the speaker. He sat on the edge of the chest, carelessly swinging one knee over the other; a man of middle height, neither tall nor short, with well-bronzed cheeks, a forehead broad and white, and an aquiline nose. He wore a beard and moustaches, and his chin jutted out. His eyes were keen, but good-humoured. Though spare he was sinewy; and an iron-hilted sword propped against his thigh seemed made for use rather than show. The upper part of his dress was of brown cloth, the lower of leather. A weather-stained cloak, which he had taken off, lay on the chest beside him.

"You are a man!" cried Marie, her eyes leaving him again. "But as for these——"

"Stay, mistress!" the clerk broke in. "Your brother does but collect himself. If the Duke of Mayenne returns to-morrow, as our friend here says is likely—and I have heard the same myself—he will keep his men in better order. That is true. And we might risk it if the watch would leave us a clear street."

Felix nodded sullenly. "Shut the door," he said to his sister, the deep gloom on his countenance in sharp contrast with the excitement she betrayed. "There is no need to let the neighbours see us."

This time she obeyed him. Susanne too crept from her skirts, and threw herself on her knees, hiding her face on a chair. "Ay!" said Marie, looking down at her with the first expression of tenderness the stranger had noted in her. "Let her weep. Let children weep. But let men work."

"We want a ladder," the clerk said, in a low voice. "And the longest we have is full three feet short."

"That is just half a man," remarked he who sat on the chest.

"What mean you?" Felix asked wonderingly.

"What I said."

"But there is nothing on which we can rest the ladder," the clerk urged.

"Then that is a whole man," quoth the stranger, curtly. "Perhaps two. I told you you would have need of me." He looked from one to the other with a smile—a careless, reckless, self-contented smile.

"You are a soldier," said Marie. And abruptly she fixed her eyes upon him.

"At times," he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"For which side?"

He shook his head. "For my own," he answered naïvely.

"A soldier of fortune?"

"At your service, mistress; now and ever."

The clerk struck in with impatience. "If we are

to do this," he said, "we had better set about it. I will fetch the ladder."

He went out, and the other men followed more slowly down the stairs; leaving Marie still standing gazing into the darkness of the front room—she had opened the door again—like one in a trance. Some odd trait in the soldier led him, as he passed out, to lay his hand on the hair of the kneeling child with a movement infinitely tender; infinitely at variance with the harsh clatter with which his sword next moment rang against the stairs as he descended.

The three men were going to do that which two for certain, and all perhaps, knew to be perilous. One went to it in gloom, reluctance and anger, as well as with sorrow at his heart. One bustled about nervously, and looked often behind him as if to see Marie's pale face at the window. And one strode out as to a ball, glancing up and down the dark lane with an air of enjoyment, which not even the grim nature of his task could suppress. The body was hanging from a bar which crossed the street at a considerable height, and served as a stay between the gables of two opposite houses, of which one was two doors only from the unhappy Portail's. The mob, with a barbarity very common in those days, had hung him on his own threshold.

The street, as the three moved into it, seemed empty and still. But it was impossible to say

how long it would remain so. Yet the soldier loitered, staring about him, as one remembering things. "Did not the Admiral live in this street?" he inquired.

"De Coligny? No. Round the corner in the Rue de Bethisy," replied the clerk, brusquely. "But see! The ladder will not reach the bar—no, not by four feet."

"Set it against the wall then—thus," said the soldier, and having done it himself, he mounted a few steps. Then he seemed to bethink himself. He jumped down again. "No," he exclaimed, peering sharply into the faces of one and the other, "I do not know you. If any one comes, my friends, and you leave the foot of the ladder, I shall be taken like a bird on a limed twig. Do you ascend, Monsieur Felix."

The young man drew back. He was not without courage, or experience of rough scenes. But the Louvre was close at hand, almost within earshot on one side, the Châtelet was scarcely farther off on the other; and both swarmed with soldiers and the armed scourings of the streets. At any moment a troop of these might pass; and should they detect any one interfering with King Mob's handiwork, he would certainly dangle in a few minutes from that same handy lamp-iron. Felix knew this, and stood at gaze. "I do not know you either," he muttered irresolutely, his hand still on the ladder.

A smile of surprising humour played on the soldier's face. "Nay, but you knew *him!*" he retorted, pointing upwards with his hand. "Trust me, young sir," he added significantly, "I am less inclined to mount now—than I was before."

The clerk intervened before Felix could resent the insult. "Steady," he said; "I will go up and do it."

"Not so!" Felix rejoined, pushing him aside in turn. And he ran up the ladder. But near the top he paused, and began to descend again. "I have no knife," he said shamefacedly.

"Pshaw! Let me come!" cried the stranger. "I see you are both good comrades. I trust you. Besides, I am more used to this ladder work than you are, and time is everything."

He ran up as he spoke, and, standing on the highest round but one, he grasped the bar above his head, and swung himself lightly up, so as to gain a seat on it. With more caution he wormed himself along it until he reached the rope. Fortunately there was a long coil of this about the bar; and warning his companions in a whisper, he carefully, and with such reverence as the time and place allowed, let down the body to them. They received it in their arms; and had just loosened the noose from the neck when an outburst of voices and the tramp of footsteps at the nearer end of the street surprised them. For an instant the two stood in the gloom, breathless, stricken

still, confounded. Then with a single impulse they lifted the body between them, and huddled blindly towards the door of the Portails' house. It opened at their touch, they stumbled in, and it fell to behind them. The foremost of the armed watch had been within ten paces of them. The escape was narrow.

Yet they had escaped. But what next? What of their comrade? The moment the door was closed behind them, one at least would have rushed out again, ay, to certain death, so strongly had the soldier's trust appealed to his honour. But they had the body in their arms; and by the time it was laid on the stairs, a score of men had passed. The opportunity was over. They could do nothing but listen. "Heaven help him!" fell from the clerk's quivering lips. Pulling the door close, they stood, looking each moment to hear a challenge, a shot, the clash of swords. But no. They heard the party halt under the gallows, and pass some brutal jest, and go on. And that was all.

They could scarcely believe their ears; no, nor their eyes, when a few minutes later, the street being now quiet, they passed out, and stood in it shuddering. For there swung the corpse dimly outlined above them! There! Certainly there! The clerk seized his companion's arm and drew him back. "It was the fiend!" he stammered. "See, your father is still there! It was the fiend who helped us!"

But at that the figure they were watching became agitated; an instant and it slid gently to the ground. It was the soldier. "O ye gods!" he cried, bent double with silent laughter. "Saw you ever such a trick? How I longed to kick, if it were but my toe at them, and I forbore! Fools! Did man ever see a body hung in its sword? But it was a good trick, eh?" he continued, appealing to them with a simple pride in his invention. "I had the rope loose in my hand when they came, and I drew it twice round my neck—and one arm trust me—and swung off gently. It is not every one who would have thought of that, my children!"

It was odd. They shook with fear, and he with laughter. He did not seem to give a thought to the danger he had escaped. Pride in his readiness and a keen sense of the humorous side of the incident possessed him entirely. At the very door of the house he still chuckled from time to time; muttering between the ebullitions, "Ah, I must tell Diane! Diane will be pleased—at that! It was good! Very good!"

Once in the house, however, he acted with more delicacy than might have been imagined. He stood aside while the other two carried the body upstairs; and while they were absent, he waited patiently in the bare room below, which showed signs of occasional use as a stable. Here the clerk Adrian presently found him, and murmured some apology. Mistress Marie, he said, had fainted.

"A matter which afflicts you, my friend," the soldier replied with a grimace, "about as much as your master's death. Pooh, man, do not look fierce! Good luck to you and your suit. Only if —but this is no house for gallantry to-night—I had spruced myself and taken a part, you had had to look to your one ewe lamb, I warrant you!"

The clerk turned pale and red by turns. This man seemed to read his thoughts as if he had indeed been the fiend. "What do you wish?" he stammered.

"Only shelter until the early morning when the streets are most quiet; and a direction to the Rue des Lombards."

"The Rue des Lombards?"

"Yes, why not?" But though the soldier still smiled, the lines of his mouth hardened suddenly. "Why not to the Rue des Lombards?"

"I know no reason why you should not be going there," the clerk replied boldly. "It was only that the street is near; and a friend of my late master's lives in it."

"His name?"

The clerk started; the question was put so abruptly, and in a tone so imperious, it struck him as it were a blow. "Nicholas Toussaint," he answered involuntarily.

"Ay?" replied the other, raising his hand to his chin and glancing at Adrian with a look that for

all the world reminded him of an old print of the eleventh Louis, which hung in a room at the Hotel de Ville—so keen and astute was it. "Your master, young man, was of the moderate party—a Politique?"

"He was."

"A good man and a Catholic? one who loved France? A Leaguer only in name?" the other continued with vividness.

"Yes, that is so."

"But his son? He is a Leaguer out and out—one who would rise to fortune on the flood tide of the mob? A Sorbonnist? The priests have got hold of him? He would do to others as they have done to his father? A friend of Le Clerc and Boucher? That is all so, is it not?"

Adrian nodded reluctantly. This strange man confounded and yet fascinated him: this man so reckless and gay one moment, so wary the next; exchanging in an instant the hail of a boon companion for the tone of a noble.

"And is your young master also a friend of this Nicholas Toussaint?" was the next question, slowly put.

"No," said Adrian, "he has been forbidden the house. M. Toussaint does not approve of his opinions."

"That is so, is it?" the stranger rejoined with his former gaiety. "And now enough: where will you lodge me until morning?"

"If my closet will serve you," Felix answered with a hesitation he would not have felt a few minutes before, "it is at your will. I will bring some food there at once, and will let you out if you please at five." And Adrian added some simple directions, by following which his guest might reach the Rue des Lombards without difficulty.

An hour later if the thoughts of those who lay sleepless under that roof could have been traced, strange contrasts would have appeared. Was Felix Portail thinking of his dead father, or of his sweetheart in the Rue des Lombards, or of his schemes of ambition? Was he blaming the crew of whom until to-day he had been one, or sullenly cursing those factious Huguenots as the root of the mischief? Was Adrian thinking of his kind master, or of his master's daughter? Was the guest dreaming of his narrow escape? or revolving plans beside which Felix's were but the schemes of a rat in a drain? Perhaps Marie alone—for Susanne slept a child's sleep of exhaustion—had her thoughts fixed on him, who only a few hours before had been the centre of the household.

But such is life in troubled times. Pleasure and pain come mingled, and men snatch the former from the midst of the latter with a trembling joy, a fierce eagerness: knowing that if they wait to go a pleasuring until the sky be clear, they may wait until nightfall.

When Adrian called his guest at cock-crow the

latter rose briskly and followed him down to the door. "Well, young sir," he said, pausing an instant on the threshold, as he wrapped his cloak round him and took his sheathed sword in his hand, "I am obliged to you. When I can do you a service, I will."

"You can do me one now," the clerk replied bluntly. "It is ill work having to do with strangers in these days. You can tell me who you are, and to which side you belong."

"Which side? I have told you—my own. And for the rest," the soldier continued, "I will give you a hint." He brought his lips near to the other's ear, and whispered, "Kiss Marie—for me!"

The clerk looked up aflame with anger and surprise; but the other was far gone striding down the street. Yet Adrian received an answer to his question. For as the stranger disappeared in the gloom, he turned his head and broke with an audacity that took away the listener's breath into a well-known air,

> "Hau! Hau! Papegots!
> Faites place aux Huguenots!"

and trilled it as merrily as if he had been in the streets of Rochelle.

"Death!" the clerk exclaimed, getting back into the house, and barring the door in a panic. "I thought so. He is a Huguenot. But if he take his neck out of Paris unstretched, he will have the fiend's own luck, and the Béarnais' to boot!"

II

When the clerk had re-mounted the stairs, he heard voices in the back room. Felix and Marie were in consultation. The girl was a different being this morning. The fire and fury of the night had sunk to a still misery; and even to her, for his sister's sake, it seemed over-dangerous to stay in the house and confront the rage of the mob. Mayenne might not after all return: and in that case the Sixteen would assuredly wreak their spite on all, however young or helpless, who might have had to do with the removal of the body. "You must seek shelter with some friend," Felix urged, "before the city is astir. I can go to the University. I shall be safe there."

"Could you not take us with you?" Marie suggested meekly.

He shook his head, his face flushing. It was hard to confess that he had power to destroy, but none to protect. "You had better go to Nicholas Toussaint's," he said. "You will be safe there, and he will take you in, though he will have naught to do with me."

Marie assented with a sigh, and rose to make ready. Some few valuables were hidden or secured, some clothes taken; and then the little party of four passed out into the street, leaving but one solemn tenant in their home. The cold light of a November morning gave to the lane an air, even

in their eyes, of squalor and misery. The kennel running down the middle was choked with nastiness, while here and there the upper stories leaned forward so far as to obscure the light.

The fugitives regarded these things little after the first shivering glance, but hurried on their road; Felix with his sword marching on one side of the girls, and Adrian with his club walking on the other. A skulking dog got out of their way. The song of a belated reveller drove them for a time under an arch. But they fell in with nothing more formidable, and in five minutes came safely to the high wooden gates of the courtyard in front of Nicholas Toussaint's house.

To arouse him or his servants without disturbing the neighbourhood was another matter. There was no bell; only a heavy iron clapper. Adrian tried this cautiously, with little hope of being heard. To his joy the hollow sound had scarcely ceased when footsteps were heard crossing the court, and a small trap in one of the gates was opened. An elderly man with high cheek bones and curly grey hair looked out. His eyes lighting on the girls lost their harshness. "Marie Portail!" he exclaimed. "Ah! poor thing, I pity you. I have heard all. I returned to the city last night only, or I should have been with you. And Adrian?"

"We have come," said the young man, respectfully, "to beg shelter for Mistress Marie and her

sister. It is no longer safe for them to remain in the Rue de Tirchape."

"I can well believe it," cried Toussaint, vigorously. "I do not know where we are safe nowadays. But there," he added in a different tone, "no doubt the Sixteen are acting for the best."

"You will take them in then?" said Adrian with gratitude.

But to his astonishment the citizen shook his head, while an awkward embarrassment twisted his features. "It is impossible!" he said.

Adrian doubted if he had heard aright. Nicholas Toussaint was known for a bold man; one whom the Sixteen disliked, and even suspected of Huguenot leanings, but one too whom they had not yet dared to attack. He was a dealer in Norman horses, and this both led him to employ many men, reckless daring fellows, and made him in some degree necessary to the army. Adrian had never doubted that he would shelter the daughter of his old friend; and his surprise on receiving this rebuff was extreme.

"But, Monsieur Toussaint—" he urged—and his face reddened with generous warmth as he stood forward. "My master is dead! Foully murdered! He lies who says otherwise, though he be of the Sixteen! My mistress has few friends to protect her, and those of small power. Will you send her and the child from your door?"

"Hush, Adrian," the girl interposed, lifting her head proudly, yet laying her hand on the clerk's sleeve with a touch of acknowledgment that brought the blood in redoubled force to his cheeks. "Do not press our friend overmuch. If he will not take us in from the streets, be sure he has some good reason to offer."

But Toussaint was dumb. Shame — a shame augmented tenfold by the clerk's fearlessness—was so clearly written on his face, that Adrian uttered none of the reproaches which hung on his lips. It was Felix who came forward, and cried contemptuously, "So you have grown strangely cautious of a sudden, M. Toussaint?"

"Ha! I thought you were there, or thereabouts!" the horse-dealer replied, regaining his composure at once, and eyeing him with strong disfavour.

"But Felix and I," Adrian exclaimed eagerly, "will fend for ourselves."

Toussaint shook his head. "It is impossible," he said surlily. "Quite impossible!"

"Then hear me!" Felix interposed with excitement. "You do not deceive me. It is not because of your daughter that you have forbidden me the house, and will not now protect my sister! It is because we shall learn too much. It is because you have those under your roof, whom the crows shall pick—yet! You, I will spare for Madeline's sake; but your spies I will string up, every one of

them by——" and he swore a frightful oath, such as the Romanists used.

Toussaint's face betrayed both fear and anger. For an instant he seemed to hesitate. Then exclaiming, "Begone, parricide! You would have killed your own father!" he slammed the trap-door, and was heard retreating up the yard with a haste and clatter which indicated his uneasiness.

The four looked at one another. Daylight had fully come. The noise of the altercation had drawn more than one sleepy face to the window. In a short time the streets would be alive with people, and even a delay of a few minutes might bring destruction. They thought of this; and moved away slowly and reluctantly, Susanne clinging to Adrian's arm, while Felix strode ahead scowling. But when they had placed a hundred yards or so between themselves and Toussaint's gates, they stopped, a chill sense of desolation upon them. Whither were they to go? Felix urged that they should seek other friends and try them. But Marie declined. If Nicholas Toussaint dared not take them in, no other of their friends would. She had given up hope, and longed only to get back to their home, and the still form, which it seemed to her she should never have deserted.

They were standing discussing this when a cry caused them to turn. A girl was running hatless

along the street; a girl tall and plump of figure, with a creamy slightly freckled face, a glory of waving golden hair upon her shoulders, and great grey eyes that could laugh and cry at once, even as they were doing now. "My poor Marie," she exclaimed, taking her in her arms; "my poor little one! Come back! You are to come back at once!" Then disengaging herself, with a blushing cheek, she allowed Felix to embrace her. But though that young gentleman made full use of his permission, his face did not clear. "Your father has just turned my sister from his door," he said bitterly, "as he turned me a month ago."

She looked at him with a tender upward glance meant for him only. "Hush!" she begged him. "Do not speak so of my father. And he has sent to fetch them back. He says he cannot keep them himself, but if they will come in and rest he will see them safely disposed. Will not that do?"

"Excellently, Miss Madeline," Adrian cried with gratitude. "And we thank your father a thousand times."

"Nay, but—" she said slyly—"that permission does not extend to you."

"What matter?"

"What matter if Marie be safe you mean," she replied demurely. "Well, I would I had so gallant a—clerk," with a glance at her own handsome lover. "But come, my father is waiting at the gate for us." And she urged haste, notwithstand-

ing which she and Felix were the last to turn. When she at length ran after the others her cheeks betrayed her.

"I can see what you have been doing, girl," her father cried, meeting her within the door. "For shame, hussy! Go to your room, and take your friends with you." And he aimed a light blow at her, which she easily evaded.

"They will need breakfast," she persisted. She had seen her lover, and though the interview might have had its drawbacks—best known to herself—she cared little for a blow in comparison with that.

"They will take it in your room," he retorted. "Come, pack, girl! Pack! I will talk to you presently," he added, with meaning.

The Portails drew her away. To them her room was a haven of rest, where they felt safe, and could pour out their grief, and let her pity and indignation soothe them. The horror of the last twenty-four hours began to fall from them. They seemed to themselves to be outcasts no longer.

In the afternoon Toussaint reappeared. "On with your hoods," he cried briskly, his good humour re-established. "I and half a dozen stout lads will see you to a place where you can lie snug for a week."

Marie asked timidly about her father's funeral. "I will see to it, little one," he answered. "I will let

the curate of St. Germain know. He will do what is seemly—if the mob let him," he added to himself.

"But, father," cried Madeline, "where are you going to take them?"

"To Philip Boyer's."

"What!" the girl cried in much surprise. "His house is small and Philip and his wife are old and feeble."

"True," answered Toussaint. "But his hutch is under the Duchess's roof. There is a touch of *our great man* about Madame. Mayenne the crowd neither overmuch love, nor much fear. He will die in his bed. But with his sister it is a word and a blow. The Sixteen will not touch aught that is under her roof."

The Duchess de Montpensier was the sister of Henry Duke of Guise, Henry the Scarred, *Our great man*, as the Parisians loved to call him. He had been assassinated in the antechamber of Henry of Valois some two years before this time; and she had become the soul of the League, having more of the headstrong nature which had made him popular, than either of his brothers, Mayenne or D'Aumale.

"I see," said Madeline, kissing the girls, "you are right, father."

"Impertinent baggage!" he cried. "To your prayers and your needle. And see that while we are away you keep close, and do not venture into the courtyard even."

She was not a nervous girl, and she was used to be alone; but the bare, roomy house seemed lonely after her father and his party had set out. She wandered to the kitchen where the two old women-servants were preparing, with the aid of a turn-spit, the early supper; there she learned that only old Simon, the lame ostler, was left in the stables, which stood on either side of the courtyard. This was not re-assuring news: the more as Madeline knew her father might not return for another hour. She went thence to the long eating-room on the first floor, which ran the full depth of the house, and had one window looking to the back as well as several facing the courtyard. Here she opened the door of the stove, and let the cheery glow play upon her.

Presently she grew tired of this, too, and moved to the rearward window. It looked upon a narrow lane, and a dead wall. Still, there was a chance of seeing some one pass, some stranger; whereas the windows which looked on the empty courtyard were no windows at all—to Madeline.

The girl had not long looked out before her pale complexion, which the fire had scarcely warmed, grew hot. She started, and glanced nervously into the room behind her; then looked out again. She had seen, standing in a nook of the wall opposite her, a figure she knew well. It was that of her lover, and he seemed to be watching the house. Timidly she waved her hand to him, and he, after

looking up and down the lane, advanced to the window. He could do this safely, for it was the only window in the Toussaints' house which looked that way.

"Are you alone?" he whispered, looking up at her.

She nodded.

"And my sisters? I am here to learn what has become of them."

"Have gone to Philip Boyer's. He lives in one of the cottages on the left of the Duchess's court."

"Ah! And you? Where is your father?" he murmured.

"He has gone to take them. I am alone; and two minutes ago I was melancholy," she added, with a smile that should have made him happy.

"I want to talk to you," he replied. "May I climb up if I can, Madeline?"

She shook her head, which of course meant, no. And she said, "It is impossible." But she smiled; and that meant, yes. Or so he took it.

There was a pipe which ran up the wall a couple of feet or so on one side of the casement. Before she understood his plan, or that he was in earnest, he had gripped this, and was halfway up to the window.

"Oh, take care," she cried. "Do not come, Felix. Do not come. My father will never forgive you!" Woman-like she repented, when it was too late. But he did not listen, he came on, and when

his hand was stretched out to grasp the sill, all her fear was lest he should fall. She seized his wrist, and helped him in. Then she drew back. "You should not have done it, Felix," she said, drawing back from him with reproof in her eyes.

"But I wanted to see you so much," he urged, "and the glimpse I had of you this morning was nothing."

"Well, you may come to the stove and warm yourself—a moment. Oh! how cold your hands are, my poor boy! But you must not stay. Indeed you must not!" And she cast terrified glances at the door.

But stolen moments are sweet and apt to be long drawn out. She had a great deal to say, and he had a great deal it seemed to ask—so much to ask indeed, that gradually a dim sense that he was asking about other things than herself—about her father and the ways of the house, and what guests they had, came over her.

It chilled her. She drew away from him, and said, suddenly, "Oh, Felix!" and looked at him.

Nothing more. But he understood her and coloured; and tried to ask, but asked awkwardly, "What is the matter?"

"I know of what you are thinking," she said with grave sorrow. "And it is base of you, it is cruel! You would use even me whom you love—to ruin my friends!"

"Hush!" he answered, letting his gloomy pas-

sion have vent for the moment, "they are not your friends, Madeline. See what they have done for me. It is they, or the troubles they have set on foot, that have killed my father!" And he swore—carried away by his mistaken resentment—never again to spare a Huguenot save her father and one other.

She trembled and tried to close her ears. Her father had told her a hundred times that she could not be happy with a husband divided from her by a gulf so wide. She had said to him that it was too late. She had given Felix her heart and she was a woman. She could not take it back, though she knew that nothing but unhappiness could come of the match.

"God forgive you!" she cried in that moment of strained insight; and sank in her chair as though she would weep.

He fell on his knees beside her with words of endearment; for he had conquered himself again. And she let him soothe her, and would gladly have believed him. She had never loved him more than now, when she knew the price she must pay for him. She closed her eyes—for the moment—to that terrible future, that certain future; and he was holding her in his arms, when without warning a heavy footstep began to ascend the stairs.

They sprang apart. If even then he had had presence of mind, he might have reached the window. But he hesitated, looking in her startled

eyes, and waiting. "Is it your father?" he whispered.

She shook her head. "He cannot have returned. We should have heard the gates opened. There is no one in the house," she murmured faintly, listening while she spoke.

But still the footsteps came on: and stopped at the door. Felix looked round him with eyes of despair. Close beside him, just behind the stove, was the door of a closet. He took two strides, and before he or she had thought of the consequences, he was in the closet. Softly he drew the door to again; and she sank terrified on a chair, as the door of the room opened.

He who came in was not her father but a man of thirty-five, a stranger to her. A man with a projecting chin. His keen grey eyes wore at the moment of his entrance an expression of boredom and petulance, but when he caught sight of her, this passed, as a cloud from the sky. He came across the floor smiling. "Pardon me," he said—but said it as if no pardon were needed, "I found the stables—insupportably dull. I set out on a voyage of discovery. I have found my America!" And he bowed in a style which puzzled the frightened girl.

"You want to see my father?" she stammered, "He——"

"He has gone to the Duchess's. I know it. And very ill-natured it was of him to leave me in

the stable, instead of entrusting me to your care, mistress. La Nouë," he continued, "is in the stable still, asleep on a bundle of hay, and a pretty commotion there will be—when he finds I have stolen away!"

Laughing with an easy carelessness that struck the citizen's daughter with fresh astonishment, the stranger drew up the armchair, which was commonly held sacred to M. Toussaint's use, and threw himself into it; lazily disposing his booted feet in the glow which poured from the stove, and looking across at his companion with admiration in his bold eyes. At another time she might have been offended by the look: or she might not. Women are variable. Now her fears lest Felix should be discovered dulled her apprehension.

Yet the name of La Nouë had caught her ear. She knew it well, as all France and the Low Countries knew it in those days, for the name of one of the boldest and stanchest soldiers on the Huguenot side.

"La Nouë?" she murmured, misty suspicions beginning to take form in her mind.

"Yes, pretty one," he replied, laughing. "La Nouë and no other. Does Bras-de-fer pass for an ogre here in Paris that you tremble so at his name? Let me——"

But whatever the proposition he was going to offer, it came to nothing. The dull clash of the gates outside warned both of them that Nicholas

Toussaint and his party had returned. A moment later a hasty tread sounded on the stairs; and an elderly man wearing a cloak burst in upon them.

His eyes swept the room while his hand still held the door; and it was clear that what he saw did not please him. He came forward stiffly, his brows knitted. But he said nothing; he seemed uncertain and embarrassed.

"See!" the first comer said, looking quietly up at him, but not offering to move. "Now what do you think of your ogre? And by the rood he looks fierce enough to eat babes! There, old friend," he continued, speaking to the elder man in a different tone, "spare your lecture. This is Toussaint's daughter, and as staunch I will warrant as her father."

The old noble—he had but one arm, she saw—still looked at her with disfavour. "Girls have sweethearts, sire," he said shrewdly.

For a moment—at that word—the room seemed to go round with her. Though something more of reproach and playful defence passed between the two men, she heard not a syllable of it. The consciousness that her lover was listening to every word, and that from this moment La Nouë's life was in his hands, numbed her brain. She sat helpless, hardly aware that half a dozen men were entering, her father one of them. When a lamp was called for—it was growing dark—she did not

stir: and Toussaint, who had not seen her, fetched it himself.

By the time he came back she had partly recovered her wits. She noted that her father locked the door with care before he set the lamp on the table. As its light fell on the harsh features of the men, a ray passed between two of them, and struck her pale face. Her father saw her and stared in astonishment.

"By heaven!" he cried. "What does the wench here?" No one answered; but all turned and looked at her where she cowered back against the stove. "Go, girl!" Toussaint cried, beside himself with passion. "Begone! and presently I will deal with you!"

"Nay, stop!" La Nouë interposed. "Your daughter knows too much. We cannot let her go thus."

"Knows too much? How?" and the citizen tossed his head like a bull balked in his charge. "What does she know?"

"His majesty——"

"Nay, let his majesty speak for himself—for once," said the man with the grey eyes; and even in her terror and confusion Madeline saw that all turned to him with a single movement. "Mistress Toussaint did but chat with La Nouë and myself, during her father's absence. True, she knows us; or one of us. But if any be to blame it is I. Let her stay. I will answer for her fidelity."

"Nay, but she is a woman, sire," some one objected.

"Ay, she is, good Poulain," and Henry turned to the speaker with a singularly bright smile. "So we are safe; for there is no woman in France would betray Henry of Bourbon!"

A laugh went round. Some one mentioned the Duchess.

"True!" said Henry, for Henry it was, he whom the Leaguers called the Béarnais and the Politiques the King of Navarre, but whom later generations have crowned as the first of French kings—Henry the Great. "True! I had forgotten her. I must beware of her golden scissors. We have two crowns already, and want not another of her making. But come, let us to business without farther delay. Be seated, gentlemen; be seated without ceremony: and while we consider whether our plans hold good, Mistress Toussaint—" he paused and turned, to look kindly at the terrified girl—"will play the sentry for us."

Madeline's presence within a few feet of their council-board was soon forgotten by the eager men who sat round the table. And in a sense she forgot them. She heard, it is true, their hopes and plans, of which the chief, and that which brought them together to-day, was a scheme to surprise Paris by introducing men hidden in carts laden with hay. She heard how Henry and La Nouë had entered, and who had brought them in,

and how it was proposed to smuggle them out again; and many details of men and means and horses; and who were loyal and who disaffected, and who might be bought over, and at what price. She even took note of the manner of each speaker as he leaned forward, and brought his face within the circle of light, marking who were known to her before, substantial citizens these, constant at mass and market; and who were strangers, men fiercer looking, thinner, haughtier, more restless, with the stamp of constant peril at the corners of their eyes, and swords some inches longer than their neighbours'.

She saw and heard all this, and more, and reasoned dully on it. But all the time her mind was paralysed by the numbing sense of one great evil awaiting her, of something with which she must presently come face to face, though her faculties had not grasped it yet. Men's lives! Ah, yes, men's lives! The girl had been bred a Huguenot. She had been taught to revere the men of the religion, the men whose names were household words; and not the weakness of the cause, not even her lover's influence, had sapped her loyalty to it.

Presently there was a stir about the table. Some of the men rose. "Then that arrangement meets your views, sire?" said La Nouë.

"I think it is the better suggestion. Let it hold. I sleep to-night at my good friend Mazeau's," the king answered, turning to the person

he named; "and leave to-morrow about noon by St. Martin's gate. That is understood, is it? Then let it stand so."

He did not see—none of them saw—how the girl in the shadow by the stove started; nor did they mark how the last trace of colour fled from her cheeks. She was face to face with her fate now, and knew that her own hand must work it out. The men were separating. Henry had risen and was bidding farewell to one and another; until no more than four or five beside Toussaint and La Nouë remained with him. Then he prepared himself to go, and girt on his sword, talking earnestly the while. Still engaged in low converse with one of the strangers, he walked slowly, lighted by his host to the door; he had forgotten to take leave of the girl. In another minute he and they would have disappeared in the passage, when a hoarse sound escaped from Madeline's lips.

It was not so much a cry as a groan, but it was enough for men whose nerves were strained to the breaking point. All—at the moment they had their backs to her, their faces to the king—turned swiftly. "Ha!" Henry cried on the instant, "I had forgotten my manners. I was leaving my most faithful sentry without a word of thanks, or a keepsake by which to remember Henry of France."

She had risen, and was supporting herself—but she swayed as she stood—by the arm of the chair.

Never had her lover been so dear to her; never had his faults seemed so small, his love so precious. As the king approached, the light fell on her face, on her agonized eyes, and he stopped short. "Toussaint!" he cried sharply, "your daughter is ill. Look to her!" But it was noticeable that he laid his hand on his sword.

"Stay!" she cried, the word ringing shrilly through the room. "You are betrayed! There is some one—there!" she pointed to the closet—"who has heard—all! All! Oh, sire, mercy! mercy!"

As the last words passed the girl's writhing lips she clutched at her throat: she seemed to fight a moment for breath, for life: then with a stifled shriëk fell in a swoon to the ground.

A second's silence. Then a whistling sound as half a dozen swords were snatched from the scabbards. The veteran La Nouë sprang to the door: others ran to the windows and stood before them. Only Henry—after a swift glance at Toussaint, who, pale and astonished, leaned over his daughter—stood still, his fingers on his hilt. Another second of suspense, and before any one spoke, the cupboard door swung slowly open, and Felix Portail, pale to the lips, stood before them.

"What do you here?" cried Henry, restraining by a gesture those who would have instantly flung themselves upon the spy.

"I came to see her," Felix said. He was quite calm, but a perspiration cold as death stood on

his brow, and his dilated eyes wandered from one to another. "You surprised me. Toussaint knows—that I was her sweetheart," he murmured.

"Ay, wretched man, you came to see her! And for what else?" Henry replied, his eyes, as a rule, so kindly, bent on the other in a gaze fixed and relentless.

A sudden visible quiver—as it were the agony of death—shot through Portail's frame. He opened his mouth, but for a while no sound came. His eyes sought the nearest sword with a horrid side-glance. "Kill me at once," he gasped, "before she—before——"

He never finished the sentence. With an oath the nearest Huguenot lunged at his breast, and fell back foiled by a blow from the king's hand. "Back!" cried Henry, his eyes flashing as another sprang forward, and would have done the work. "Will you trench on the King's justice in his presence? Sheath your swords, all save the Sieur de la Nouë, and the gentlemen who guard the windows!"

"He must die!" several voices cried; and two men still pressed forward viciously.

"Think, sire! Think what you do," cried La Nouë himself, warning in his voice. "He has in his hand the life of every man here! And they are your men, risking all for the crown."

"True," Henry replied smiling; "but I ask no man to run a risk I will not take myself."

A murmur of dissatisfaction burst forth. Several who had sheathed, drew their swords again. "I have a wife and child!" cried one, bringing his point to the thrust. "He dies!"

"He dies!" cried another following his example. And the two pressed forward.

"He does not die!" exclaimed the King, his voice so ringing through the room that all fell back once more; fell back not so much because it was the king who spoke as in obedience to the voice which two years before had rallied the flying squadrons at Arques, and years before that had rung out hour after hour and day after day above the long street fight of Cahors. "He does not die!" repeated Henry, looking from one to another, with his chin thrust out, and his eyes glittering. "France speaks, dare any contradict. Surely, my masters, there are no traitors here!"

"Your majesty," said La Noüe after a moment's pause, "commands our lives."

"Thanks, Francis," Henry replied, instantly changing his tone. "And now hear me, gentlemen. Think you that it was a light thing in this girl to give up her lover? She might have let us go to our doom, and we none the wiser! Would you take her gift and make her no requital? That were not just! That were not royal! That cannot the King of France do! And now for you, sir"—he turned with another manner to Felix, who was leaning half-fainting against the wall—

"hearken to me. You shall go free. I, who this morning played the son to your dead father, I give you your life for your sweetheart's sake. For her sake be true. You shall go out alive and safe into the streets of Paris, which five minutes ago you little thought to see again. The girl you love has ransomed you: go therefore and be worthy of her. Or if I am wrong, if you still will betray me —still go! Go to be damned to all eternity! Go, to leave a name that shall live for centuries—and stand for treachery!"

He spoke the last words with such scorn that a murmur of applause broke out even among those stern men. He took instant advantage of it. "Now go!" he said hurriedly. "You can take the girl with you. She has but fainted. A kiss will bring her to life. Go, and, as you love, be silent."

The man took up his burden and went, trembling; still unable to speak. But no hand was now raised to stop him.

When he had disappeared, La Nouë turned to the king. "You will not now sleep at Mazeau's, sire?"

Henry rubbed his chin. "Yes; let the plan stand," he answered after a brief pause. "If he betray one, he shall betray all."

"But this is madness," La Nouë urged.

The King shook his head, and smiling, clapped the veteran on the shoulder. "Not so," he said. "The man is no traitor: I say it. And you have never met with a longer head than Henry's."

"Never," assented La Noüe bluntly, "save when there is a woman in it!"

The curtain falls. The men have lived and are dead. La Noüe, the Huguenot Bayard, now exists only in a dusty memoir and a page of Motley. Madame de Montpensier is forgotten; all of her, save her golden scissors. Mayenne, D'Aumale, a verse preserves their names. Only Henry—the "good King," as generations of French peasants called him—remains a living figure: his strength and weakness, his sins and virtues, as well known, as thoroughly appreciated by thousands now as in the days of his life.

It follows that we cannot hope to learn much of the fortunes of people so insignificant—save for that moment when the fate of a nation hung on their breath—as the Portails and Toussaints. We do know that Felix proved worthy. For though the attack on Paris which was planned at Toussaint's house, failed, it did not fail through treachery. And we know that Felix married Madeline, and that Adrian won Marie: but no more. Unless certain Portails now living in various parts of the world, whose ancestors left France at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, are their descendants. And certainly it is curious that in these families it is not rare to find the eldest son bearing the name of Henry, and the second of Felix.

THE KING'S STRATAGEM

In the days when Henry the Fourth of France was as yet King of Navarre only, and in that little kingdom of hills and woods which occupies the south-western corner of the larger country, was with difficulty supporting the Huguenot cause against the French court and the Catholic League —in the days when every little moated town, from the Dordogne to the Pyrenees, was a bone of contention between the young king and the crafty queen-mother, Catherine de Medicis, a conference between these warring personages took place in the picturesque town of La Réole. And great was the fame of it.

La Réole still rises grey, time-worn, and half-ruined on a lofty cliff above the broad green waters of the Garonne, forty odd miles from Bordeaux. It is a small place now, but in the days of which we are speaking it was important, strongly fortified, and guarded by a castle which looked down on some hundreds of red-tiled roofs, rising in terraces from the river. As the meeting-place of the two sovereigns it was for the time as gay as Paris itself. Catherine had brought with her a bevy of fair maids of honour, and trusted more perhaps in the effect of their charms than in

her own diplomacy. But the peaceful appearance of the town was as delusive as the smooth bosom of the Gironde; for even while every other house in its streets rang with music and silvery laughter, each party was ready to fly to arms at a word if it saw that any advantage could be gained thereby.

On an evening shortly before the end of the conference two men were seated at play in a room, the deep-embrasured window of which looked down from a considerable height upon the river. The hour was late; below them the town lay silent. Outside, the moonlight fell bright and pure on sleeping fields, on vineyards, and dark far-spreading woods. Within the room a silver lamp suspended from the ceiling threw light upon the table, but left the farther parts of the chamber in shadow. The walls were hung with faded tapestry, and on a low bedstead in one corner lay a handsome cloak, a sword, and one of the clumsy pistols of the period. Across a high-backed chair lay another cloak and sword, and on the window seat, beside a pair of saddle-bags, were strewn half a dozen trifles such as soldiers carried from camp to camp—a silver comfit-box, a jewelled dagger, a mask, a velvet cap.

The faces of the players, as they bent over the cards, were in shadow. One—a slight, dark man of middle height, with a weak chin—and a mouth that would have equally betrayed its weakness

had it not been shaded by a dark moustache—seemed, from the occasional oaths which he let drop, to be losing heavily. Yet his opponent, a stouter and darker man, with a sword-cut across his left temple, and the swaggering air that has at all times marked the professional soldier, showed no signs of triumph or elation. On the contrary, though he kept silence, or spoke only a formal word or two, there was a gleam of anxiety and suppressed excitement in his eyes; and more than once he looked keenly at his companion, as if to judge of his feelings or to learn whether the time had come for some experiment which he meditated. But for this, an observer looking in through the window would have taken the two for that common conjunction—the hawk and the pigeon.

At last the younger player threw down his cards with an exclamation.

"You have the luck of the evil one," he said, bitterly. "How much is that?"

"Two thousand crowns," the other replied without emotion. "You will play no more?"

"No! I wish to heaven I had never played at all!" was the answer. As he spoke the loser rose, and moving to the window stood looking out. For a few moments the elder man remained in his seat, gazing furtively at him; at length he too rose, and, stepping softly to his companion, he touched him on the shoulder. "Your pardon a

moment, M. le Vicomte," he said. "Am I right in concluding that the loss of this sum will inconvenience you?"

"A thousand fiends!" the young gamester exclaimed, turning on him wrathfully. "Is there any man whom the loss of two thousand crowns would not inconvenience? As for me——"

"For you," the other continued smoothly, filling up the pause, "shall I be wrong in supposing that it means something like ruin?"

"Well, sir, and if it does?" the young man retorted; and he drew himself up, his cheek a shade paler with passion. "Depend upon it you shall be paid. Do not be afraid of that!"

"Gently, gently, my friend," the winner answered, his patience in strong contrast to the other's violence. "I had no intention of insulting you, believe me. Those who play with the Vicomte de Noirterre are not wont to doubt his honour. I spoke only in your own interest. It has occurred to me, Vicomte, that the matter may be arranged at less cost to yourself."

"How?" was the curt question.

"May I speak freely?" The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders, and the other, taking silence for consent, proceeded: "You, Vicomte, are governor of Lusigny for the King of Navarre; I, of Créance, for the King of France. Our towns lie but three leagues apart. Could I by any chance, say on one of these fine nights, make myself master of

Lusigny, it would be worth more than two thousand crowns to me. Do you understand?"

"No," the young man answered slowly, "I do not."

"Think over what I have said, then," was the brief answer.

For a full minute there was silence in the room. The Vicomte gazed from the window with knitted brows and compressed lips, while his companion, seated near at hand, leant back in his chair, with an air of affected carefulness. Outside, the rattle of arms and hum of voices told that the watch were passing through the street. The church bell rang one o'clock. Suddenly the Vicomte burst into a forced laugh, and, turning, took up his cloak and sword. "The trap was well laid, M. le Capitaine," he said almost jovially; "but I am still sober enough to take care of myself—and of Lusigny. I wish you good night. You shall have your money, do not fear."

"Still, I am afraid it will cost you dearly," the Captain answered, as he rose and moved towards the door to open it for his guest. And then, when his hand was already on the latch, he paused. "My lord," he said, "what do you say to this, then? I will stake the two thousand crowns you have lost to me, and another thousand to boot—against your town. Oh, no one can hear us. If you win you go off a free man with my thousand. If you lose, you put me in possession—one of these

fine nights. Now, that is an offer. What do you say to it? A single game to decide."

The younger man's face reddened. He turned; his eyes sought the table and the cards; he stood irresolute. The temptation came at an unfortunate moment; a moment when the excitement of play had given way to depression, and he saw nothing outside the door, on the latch of which his hand was laid, but the bleak reality of ruin. The temptation to return, the thought that by a single hand he might set himself right with the world, was too much for him. Slowly—he came back to the table. "Confound you!" he said passionately. "I think you are the devil himself!"

"Don't talk child's talk!" the other answered coldly, drawing back as his victim advanced. "If you do not like the offer you need not take it."

But the young man was a born gambler, and his fingers had already closed on the cards. Picking them up idly he dropped them once, twice, thrice on the table, his eyes gleaming with the play-fever. "If I win?" he said doubtfully. "What then? Let us have it quite clearly."

"You carry away a thousand crowns," the Captain answered quietly. "If you lose you contrive to leave one of the gates of Lusigny open for me before next full moon. That is all."

"And what if I lose, and do not pay the forfeit?" the Vicomte asked, laughing weakly.

"I trust to your honour," the Captain an-

swered. And, strange as it may seem, he knew his man. The young noble of the day might betray his cause and his trust, but the debt of honour incurred at play was binding on him.

"Well," said the Vicomte, with a deep breath, "I agree. Who is to deal?"

"As you will," the Captain replied, masking under an appearance of indifference the excitement which darkened his cheek, and caused the pulse in the old wound on his face to beat furiously.

"Then do you deal," said the Vicomte.

"With your permission," the Captain assented. And gathering the cards he dealt them with a practised hand, and pushed his opponent's six across to him.

The young man took up the hand and, as he sorted it, and looked from it to his companion's face, he repressed a groan with difficulty. The moonlight shining through the casement fell in silvery sheen on a few feet of the floor. With the light something of the silence and coolness of the night entered also, and appealed to him. For a few seconds he hesitated. He made even as if he would have replaced the hand on the table. But he had gone too far to retrace his steps with honour. It was too late, and with a muttered word, which his dry lips refused to articulate, he played the first card.

He took that trick and the next: they were secure.

"And now," said the Captain, who knew well where the pinch came. "What next?"

The Vicomte compressed his lips. Two courses were open to him. By adopting one he could almost for certain win one more trick: by the other he might just possibly win two tricks. He was a gamester; he adopted the latter course. In half a minute it was over. He had lost!

The winner nodded gravely. "The luck is with me still," he said, keeping his eyes on the table that the light of triumph which had leapt into them might not be seen. "When do you go back to your command, Vicomte?"

The unhappy man sat, as one stunned, his eyes on the painted cards which had cost him so dearly. "The day after to-morrow," he muttered at last, striving to collect himself.

"Then shall we say—the following evening?" the Captain asked courteously.

The young man shivered. "As you will," he muttered.

"We quite understand one another," continued the winner, eyeing his man watchfully, and speaking with more urgency. "I may depend on you, M. le Vicomte, I presume—to keep your word?"

"The Noirterres have never been wanting to their word," the young nobleman answered stung into passing passion. "If I live I will put Lusigny into your hands, M. le Capitaine. Afterwards I will do my best to recover it—in another way."

"I shall be most happy to meet you in that way," replied the Captain, bowing lightly. And in one more minute, the door of his lodging had closed on the other; and he was alone—alone with his triumph, his ambition, his hopes for the future—alone with the greatness to which his capture of Lusigny was to be the first step. He would enjoy that greatness not a whit the less because fortune had hitherto dealt out to him more blows than caresses, and he was still at forty, after a score of years of roughest service, the governor of a paltry country town.

Meanwhile, in the darkness of the narrow streets, the Vicomte was making his way to his lodgings in a state of despair difficult to describe, impossible to exaggerate. Chilled, sobered, and affrighted he looked back and saw how he had thrown for all and lost all, how he had saved the dregs of his fortune at the expense of his loyalty, how he had seen a way of escape—and lost it for ever! No wonder that as he trudged through the mud and darkness of the sleeping town his breath came quickly and his chest heaved, and he looked from side to side as a hunted animal might look, uttering great sighs. Ah, if he could have retraced the last three hours! If he could have undone that he had done!

In a fever, he entered his lodging, and securing the door behind him stumbled up the stone stairs and entered his room. The impulse to confide his

misfortunes to some one was so strong upon him that he was glad to see a dark form half sitting, half lying in a chair before the dying embers of a wood fire. In those days a man's natural confidant was his valet, the follower, half friend, half servant, who had been born on his estate, who lay on a pallet at the foot of his bed, who carried his *billets-doux* and held his cloak at the duello, who rode near his stirrup in fight and nursed him in illness, who not seldom advised him in the choice of a wife, and lied in support of his suit.

The young Vicomte flung his cloak over a chair. "Get up, you rascal!" he cried impatiently. "You pig, you dog!" he continued, with increasing anger. "Sleeping there as though your master were not ruined by that scoundrel of a Breton! Bah!" he added, gazing bitterly at his follower, "you are of the *canaille*, and have neither honour to lose nor a town to betray!"

The sleeping man moved in his chair but did not awake. The Vicomte, his patience exhausted, snatched the bonnet from his head, and threw it on the ground. "Will you listen?" he said. "Or go, if you choose look for another master. I am ruined! Do you hear? Ruined, Gil! I have lost all—money, land, Lusigny itself—at the cards!"

The man, roused at last, stooped with a sleepy movement, and picking up his hat dusted it with his hand, then rose with a yawn to his feet.

"I am afraid, Vicomte," he said, in tones that,

quiet as they were, sounded like thunder in the young man's astonished and bewildered ears, "I am afraid that if you have lost Lusigny—you have lost something which was not yours to lose!"

As he spoke he struck the embers with his boot, and the fire, blazing up, shone on his face. The Vicomte saw, with stupor, that the man before him was not Gil at all—was indeed the last person in the world to whom he should have betrayed himself. The astute smiling eyes, the aquiline nose, the high forehead, and projecting chin, which the short beard and moustache scarcely concealed, were only too well known to him. He stepped back with a cry of despair. "Sir!" he said, and then his tongue failed him. His arms dropped by his sides. He stood silent, pale, convicted, his chin on his breast. The man to whom he had confessed his treachery was the master whom he had agreed to betray.

"I had suspected something of this," Henry of Navarre continued, after a lengthy pause, and with a tinge of irony in his tone. "Rosny told me that that old fox, the Captain of Créance, was affecting your company somewhat too much, M. le Vicomte, and I find that, as usual, his suspicions were well-founded. What with a gentleman who shall be nameless, who has bartered a ford and a castle for the favour of Mademoiselle de Luynes, and yourself, and another I know of—I

am blest with some faithful followers, it seems! For shame! for shame, sir!" he continued seating himself with dignity in the chair from which he had risen, but turning it so that he confronted his host, "have you nothing to say for yourself?"

The young noble stood with bowed head, his face white. This was ruin, indeed, absolute, irremediable ruin. "Sir," he said at last, "your Majesty has a right to my life, not to my honour."

"Your honour!" Henry exclaimed, biting contempt in his tone.

The young man started, and for a second his cheek flamed under the well-deserved reproach; but he recovered himself. "My debt to your Majesty," he said, "I am willing to pay."

"Since pay you must," Henry muttered softly.

"But I claim to pay also my debt to the Captain of Créance."

The King of Navarre stared. "Oh," he said. "So you would have me take your worthless life, and give up Lusigny?"

"I am in your hands, sire."

"Pish, sir!" Henry replied in angry astonishment. "You talk like a child. Such an offer, M. de Noirterre, is folly, and you know it. Now listen to me. It was lucky for you that I came in tonight, intending to question you. Your madness is known to me only, and I am willing to overlook it. Do you hear? I am willing to pardon.

Cheer up, therefore, and be a man. You are young; I forgive you. This shall be between you and me only," the young prince continued, his eyes softening as the other's head sank lower, "and you need think no more of it until the day when I shall say to you, 'Now, M. de Noirterre, for Navarre and for Henry, strike!' "

He rose as the last words passed his lips, and held out his hand. The Vicomte fell on one knee, and kissed it reverently, then sprang to his feet again. "Sire," he said, his eyes shining, "you have punished me heavily, more heavily than was needful. There is only one way in which I can show my gratitude, and that is by ridding you of a servant who can never again look your enemies in the face."

"What new folly is this?" Henry asked sternly. "Do you not understand that I have forgiven you?"

"Therefore I cannot betray Lusigny, and I must acquit myself of my debt to the Captain of Créance in the only way which remains," the young man replied firmly. "Death is not so hard that I would not meet it twice over rather than again betray my trust."

"This is midsummer madness!" said the King, hotly.

"Possibly," replied the Vicomte, without emotion; "yet of a kind to which your Grace is not altogether a stranger."

The words appealed to that love of the fanciful and the chivalrous which formed part of the young King's nature, and was one cause alike of his weakness and his strength. In its more extravagant flights it gave opportunity after opportunity to his enemies, in its nobler and saner expressions it won victories which all his astuteness and diplomacy could not have compassed. He stood now, looking with half-hidden admiration at the man whom two minutes before he had despised.

"I think you are in jest," he said presently and with some scorn.

"No, sir," the young man answered, gravely. "In my country they have a proverb about us. 'The Noirterres,' say they, 'have ever been bad players but good payers.' I will not be the first to be worse than my name!"

He spoke with so quiet a determination that the King was staggered, and for a minute or two paced the room in silence, inwardly reviling the obstinacy of this weak-kneed supporter, yet unable to withhold his admiration from it. At length he stopped, with a low exclamation.

"Wait!" he cried. "I have it! *Ventre Saint Gris*, man, I have it!" His eyes sparkled, and, with a gentle laugh, he hit the table a sounding blow. "Ha! ha! I have it!" he repeated gaily.

The young noble gazed at him in surprise, half suspicious, half incredulous. But when Henry in

low, rapid tones had expounded his plan, the young man's face underwent a change. Hope and life sprang into it. The blood flew to his cheeks. His whole aspect softened. In a moment he was on his knee, mumbling the prince's hand, his eyes moist with gratitude. Nor was that all; the two talked long, the murmur of their voices broken more than once by the ripple of laughter. When they at length separated, and Henry, his face hidden by the folds of his cloak, had stolen to his lodgings, where, no doubt, more than one watcher was awaiting him with a mind full of anxious fears, the Vicomte threw open his window and looked out on the night. The moon had set, but the stars still shone peacefully in the dark canopy above. He remembered, his throat choking with silent emotion, that he was looking towards his home—the round towers among the walnut woods of Navarre which had been in his family since the days of St. Louis, and which he had so lightly risked. And he registered a vow in his heart that of all Henry's servants he would henceforth be the most faithful.

Meanwhile the Captain of Créance was enjoying the sweets of his coming triumph. He did not look out into the night, it is true—he was over old for sentiment—but pacing up and down the room he planned and calculated, considering how he might make the most of his success. He was still comparatively young. He had years of strength

before him. He would rise high and higher. He would not easily be satisfied. The times were troubled, opportunities were many, fools not few; bold men with brains and hands were rare.

At the same time he knew that he could be sure of nothing until Lusigny was actually in his possession; and he spent the next few days in painful suspense. But no hitch occurred nor seemed likely. The Vicomte made him the necessary communications; and men in his own pay informed him of dispositions ordered by the governor of Lusigny which left him in no doubt that the loser intended to pay his debt.

It was, therefore, with a heart already gay with anticipation that the Captain rode out of Créance two hours before midnight on an evening eight days later. The night was dark, but he knew his road well. He had with him a powerful force, composed in part of thirty of his own garrison, bold hardy fellows, and in part of six score horsemen, lent him by the governor of Montauban. As the Vicomte had undertaken to withdraw, under some pretence or other, one-half of his command and to have one of the gates opened by a trusty hand, the Captain foresaw no difficulty. He trotted along in excellent spirits, now stopping to scan with approval the dark line of his troopers, now to bid them muffle the jingle of their swords and corselets that nevertheless rang sweet music in his ears. He looked for an easy victory; but it

was not any slight misadventure that would rob him of his prey. If necessary he would fight and fight hard. Still, as his company wound along the river-side or passed into the black shadow of the oak grove, which stands a mile to the east of Lusigny, he did not expect that there would be much fighting.

Treachery alone, he thought, could thwart him; and of treachery there was no sign. The troopers had scarcely halted under the last clump of trees before a figure detached itself from one of the largest trunks, and advanced to the Captain's rein. The Captain saw with surprise that it was the Vicomte himself. For a second he thought that something had gone wrong, but the young noble's first words reassured him. "It is arranged," M. de Noirterre whispered, as the Captain bent down to him. "I have kept my word, and I think that there will be no resistance. The planks for crossing the moat lie opposite the gate. Knock thrice at the latter, and it will be opened. There are not fifty armed men in the place."

"Good!" the Captain answered, in the same cautious tone. "But you——"

"I am believed to be elsewhere, and must be gone. I have far to ride to night. Farewell."

"Till we meet again," the Captain answered; and without more he saw his ally glide away and disappear in the darkness. A cautious word set the troop in motion, and a very few minutes saw

them standing on the edge of the moat, the outline of the gateway tower looming above them, a shade darker than the wrack of clouds which overhead raced silently across the sky. A moment of suspense while one and another shivered—for there is that in a night attack which touches the nerves of the stoutest—and the planks were found, and as quietly as possible laid across the moat. This was so skilfully done that it evoked no challenge and the Captain crossing quickly with a few picked men, stood in the twinkling of an eye under the shadow of the gateway. Still no sound was heard save the hurried breathing of those at his elbow, the stealthy tread of others crossing, the persistent voices of the frogs in the water beneath. Cautiously he knocked three times and waited. The third rap had scarcely sounded before the gate rolled silently open, and he sprang in, followed by his men.

So far so good. A glance at the empty street and the porter's pale face told him at once that the Vicomte had kept his word. But he was too old a soldier to take anything for granted, and forming up his men as quickly as they entered, he allowed no one to advance until all were inside, and then, his trumpet sounding a wild note of defiance, two-thirds of his force sprang forward in a compact body while the other third remained to hold the gate. In a moment the town awoke to find itself in the hands of the enemy.

As the Vicomte had promised, there was no resistance. In the small keep a score of men did indeed run to arms, but only to lay their weapons down without striking a blow when they became aware of the force opposed to them. Their leader, sullenly acquiescing, gave up his sword and the keys of the town to the victorious Captain; who, as he sat his horse in the middle of the market-place, giving his orders and sending off riders with the news, already saw himself in fancy Governor of Angoulême and Knight of the Holy Ghost.

As the red light of the torches fell on steel caps and polished hauberks, on the serried ranks of pikemen, and the circle of whitefaced townsfolks, the picturesque old square looked doubly picturesque and he who sat in the midst, its master, doubly a hero. Every five minutes, with a clatter of iron on the rough pavement and a shower of sparks, a horseman sprang away to tell the news at Montauban or Cahors; and every time that this occurred, the Captain, astride on his charger, felt a new sense of power and triumph.

Suddenly the low murmur of voices about him was broken by a new sound, the distant beat of hoofs, not departing but arriving, and coming each moment nearer. It was but the tramp of a single horse, but there was something in the sound which made the Captain prick his ears, and secured for the arriving messenger a speedy passage

through the crowd. Even at the last the man did not spare his horse, but spurred through the ranks to the Captain's very side, and then and then only sprang to the ground. His face was pale, his eyes were bloodshot. His right arm was bound up in bloodstained cloths. With an oath of amazement, the Captain recognized the officer whom he had left in charge of Créance, and he thundered, "What is this? What is it?"

"They have got Créance!" the man gasped, reeling as he spoke. "They have got—Créance!"

"Who?" the Captain shrieked, his face purple with rage.

"The little man of Béarn! The King of Navarre! He assaulted it five hundred strong an hour after you left, and had the gate down before we could fire a dozen shots. We did what we could, but we were but one to seven. I swear, Captain, that we did all we could. Look at this!"

Almost black in the face, the Captain swore another oath. It was not only that he saw governorship and honours vanish like Will-o'-the-wisps, but that he saw even more quickly that he had made himself the laughing-stock of a kingdom! And that was the truth. To this day, among the stories which the southern French love to tell of the prowess and astuteness of their great Henry, there is no tradition more frequently told, none

more frequently made the subject of mirth, than that of the famous exchange of Créance for Lusigny; of the move by which between dawn and sunrise, without warning, without a word, he gave his opponents mate.

THE HOUSE ON THE WALL

In the summer of 1706, two years after the second battle of Hochstett, which Englishmen call Blenheim, in a world ringing with the names of Marlborough and Eugene, Louis of Baden and Villars, Villeroy the Incapable and Boufflers the Brave—a world, for us of later days, of dark chaos, luridly lit by the flames of burning hamlets, and galloped through by huge troopers wearing periwigs and thigh boots, and carrying pistols two feet long in the barrel—one of the Austrian captains sat down before the frontier town of Huymonde, in Spanish Flanders, and prepared to take it.

Whereat Huymonde was not too greatly or too fearfully moved. A warm town, of fat burghers and narrow streets, and oak wainscots that winked in the firelight, and burnished flagons that caught the drinker's smile, it was not to be lightly excited; and it had been besieged, heaven only knows how many times before. Men made ready as for a long frost, took count of wine and provisions, and hiding a portion of each under the cellar floor, thanked God that they were not the garrison, and that times were changed since the Thirty Years' War. These things done and the

siege formed, they folded their hands and let themselves slide into the current of an idle life, flecked from time to time with bubbles of excitement. When the Austrian guns rumbled without, and the smoke eddied slowly over the walls, they stood in the streets, their hands in their muffs, and gossiped not unpleasantly; when the cannon were silent they smoked their long pipes on the ramparts, and measured the advance of the trenches, and listened while the oldest inhabitant prosed of the sack by Spinola in '24 and the winter siege of '41.

Whether the good townsfolk were as brave in private—when at home with their wives, for instance—may be doubted; but this for certain, the Burgomaster's trouble lay all with the women. Whether they had less faith in the great Louis, Fourteenth of the name, King of France—who, indeed, seemed in these days less superior to a world in arms than in the dawn of his glory—or they found the oldest inhabitant's tales too precisely to the point, they had a way of growing restive once a week, besieged the good Burgomaster's house, and demanded—with a thousand shrill and voluble tongues—immediate surrender on terms. Between whiles, being busy with scrubbing and baking, and washing their children, they were quiet enough. But as surely as Sunday came round, and with it a clean house and leisure to chat with the neighbours, the Burgomaster's hour

came too, and with it the mob of women shaking crooked fingers at him, and bursting his ears with their shrill abuse. He was a bold man, but he began to dream at night of De Witt and his fate—of which he knew, with many gruesome particulars; and, from a stout and pompous burgher, he dwindled in six weeks to a lean and morose old tyrant. Withal he had no choice, for at his shoulder lurked the French Commandant, a resolute man with a wit of his own and a pet curtain—between the Stadthaus bastion and the bastion of the Bronze Horse, and very handy to the former—whereat he shot deserters and the like on the smallest pretext.

Still, the Burgomaster, as he wiped his sallow face, and watched the last of the women withdraw on the seventh Sunday of the Siege, began to think that, rather than pass through this again, he would face even the curtain and a volley; if he were sure that one volley would do it, and no botching. The ordeal had been more severe than usual: his cheek still twitched, and he leaned against his official table to belie his trembling knees. He had been settling a change of billets, when the viragos broke in on him, and only his clerk had been present; for his council—and this he felt sorely—much bullied in old days, were treating him to solitude and the monopoly of the burden. His clerk was with him now; but affected to be busy with the papers on the table. Per-

haps he was scared too, and equally bent on hiding it; at any rate, it was the Burgomaster who first discovered that they were not alone, but that one woman still lingered. She had placed herself in a corner of the oak seat that ran round the panelled room; and the stained glass of the windows, blazoned with the arms of Huymonde and the Counts of Flanders, cast a veil of tawny lights between her and the gazer; behind which she seemed to lurk. The Burgomaster started, then remembered that the danger was over for the time—he was not afraid of one woman; and in a harsh voice he bade her follow her mates.

"Begone, wench!" he said. "And go to your prayers! That is women's work. Leave these things to men."

The woman rose to her full height. "When men," she answered, in a voice at which the Burgomaster started afresh, "hide themselves, it is time women stood forward. Where is your son?"

The Burgomaster swore.

"Where is your son?" the woman repeated firmly.

The Burgomaster swore again, his sallow face grown purple: then he looked at his clerk and signed to him to go. The clerk went, wondering and gaping—for this was unusual—and the two were left together.

At that the Burgomaster found his voice. "You Jezebel!" he cried, approaching the woman.

"How dare you come here to make mischief? How dare you lay your tongue to my son's name? Do you know, shameless one, that if I were to give the word——"

But at that word the woman caught fire, blazed up, and outdid him in rage. She was a middle-aged woman and spare, with a face naturally pale and refined, and an air of pride that peeped even through the neat poverty of her dress. But at that word she shook her hands in his face and her eyes blazed.

"Shameless?" she retorted. "No, but shameful; and through whom? Through your son, your villain, your craven of a son who hides now! Through your base-born tradesman of a son who dare face neither woman nor man."

"Silence!" the Burgomaster cried. "Silence!"

She broke off, but only to throw her whole soul into one breathless cry.

"Will he marry her?" she panted; and she held out her hands to him, palm uppermost. "Will he marry her? In a word."

"No," the Burgomaster answered grimly.

She flung up her arms.

"Then beware!" she cried wildly, and for the first time she raised her voice to the pitch of those other shrews. "Beware! You and yours have brought us to shame; but the end is not yet, the end is not yet! You do not know us."

At that he rallied himself. "I may not know

you yet," he said hardily, and indeed brutally; "but I know this, that such things as these come, woman, of people setting themselves up to be better than their neighbours, when they are as poor as church mice. They come of slighting honest fellows and setting caps at those above you. Your daughter—or you, woman, if you like it better—set the trap, and you are caught in it yourselves. That is all."

"You wretch!" she gasped. "And he—will not marry her?"

"Not while I live," he answered firmly.

"And that is your last word?"

"It is," he said. "My very last."

He was on his guard, prepared to defend himself even against actual violence. For he knew what angry women were and of what they were capable even against a Burgomaster. But after a tense pause of suspense, during every moment of which he expected her to fall upon him, she said only, "Where is he?"

"I shall not tell you," he answered. "Nor would it help you if you knew!"

"And that is all?"

"That is all."

It was not their first interview. She had pled with him before, and knelt and wept and abased herself before him. She had done all that the love that tore her heartstrings—the love that made it so much more difficult to see her child

suffer than to suffer herself, the love that every moment painted the bare room at home, and her daughter prostrate there in shame and despair—she had done all that even love could suggest. There was no room therefore for farther pleading, for farther prayers; she had threatened, and she had failed. What, then, remained to be done?

Nothing, the Burgomaster thought, as in a flash of triumph and relief he watched her go, outfaced and defeated. Nothing; and he hugged himself on the prudence that had despatched his son out of the way in time, and rendered a match with that proud pauper brat impossible. Nothing; but to the woman, as she went, it seemed that everything remained to be done. As she left the little square with its tall slender gabled houses and plunged into the narrow street that led to her house on the wall, the story of her life in Huymonde spread itself before her in a string of scenes that now—now alas! but never before—seemed to find their natural sequence in this tragedy. Nine years before she had come to Huymonde with her artist husband; but the great art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was already dying or dead in Flanders, and with it the artistic sense, and the honour once paid to it. Huymonde made delft still, and pottery, but on old conventional lines, in an endless repetition of old formal patterns, with no touch of genius or appreciation. Trade, and a desire to win

the florid ease, the sleek comfort of the burgher, possessed the town wholly. The artist had found himself a stranger in a strange land; had struggled on, despising and despised, in the quaint house on the wall, at which he had snatched on his first coming because it looked over the open country. There, after seven years, he had slipped out of life, scarcely better known, and no whit more highly appreciated than on the day of his arrival.

After that the story was of two women living *sola cum solâ*—one wholly for the other—suspected, if not disliked, by their neighbours, and for their part alien in all their thoughts and standards; since the artist's widow could not forget that he had been the favourite pupil of Peter Paul's old age, or that her father had counted quarterings. *Sola cum solâ*, until one day the war began, and Huymonde set about looking to its defences. Then a young man appeared on a certain evening to inspect the House on the Wall, and see that the window, which looked out upon the level country side, was safely and properly built up and strengthened.

"You must have a sergeant and guard billeted here!" was his first sharp word; and the widow had sighed at this invasion of their privacy, which was also their poverty. But the young girl, standing sideways in that very window, which was to be closed, had pouted her red lips and frowned on

the intruder, and the sergeant had not come, nor the guard. Instead the young man had returned, at first weekly, then at shorter intervals, to see that the window defences remained intact; and with his appearance life in the House on the Wall had become a different thing. He was the son of the Burgomaster of the town, he would be the richest man in the town, his wife might repay with interest and advantage the dull bovine scorn to which the city dames had treated her mother. The widow permitted herself to hope. Her child was beautiful, with the creamy fairness of Gueldres, and as pure as the sky. The young man was gay and handsome; qualities which made their due impression on the elder woman's heart, long unfamiliar with them. So, for more than a year he had had the run of the house, he had been one of the family; and then one day he had disappeared, and then one other day——

Oh, God of vengeance! She paused in the darkening street, as she thought of it. Beside her a long window, warmly curtained, sent out a stream of ruddy light. From the opposite house issued cheery voices and tinkling laughter, and the steam of cooking. And before and behind, whichever way she looked, firelight flashed through diamond panes and glowed in the heart of green bottle-glass. Out in the street men shouldered past her, talking blithely; and in distant kitchens cups clinked and ware clattered, and every house—

every house from garret to parlour, seemed to her a home happy and gleeful. A home; and *her* home! She stood at the thought and cursed them; cursed them, and like the echo of her whispered words the solemn boom of a cannon floated over the town.

A chance passer, seeing her stand thus, caught the whiteness of her face, and thought her afraid. "Cheer up, mother!" he said over his shoulder, "they are all bark and little bite!"

"I would they bit to the bone!" she cried in fury.

But luckily he was gone too far to hear or to understand; and, resuming her course, she hurried on, her head bowed. A few minutes' walking brought her to the foot of the stone steps that, in two parallel flights, led up to the low-browed door of her house. There, as she set her foot on the lowest stair, and wearily began the ascent, a man advanced out of the darkness and touched her sleeve. For an instant she thought it *the* man, and she caught her breath and stepped back. But his first word showed her her mistake.

"You live here?" he said abruptly. "Can I come in?"

In ordinary times his foreign accent and the glint of a pistol-barrel, which caught her eye as he spoke, would have set her on her guard. But to-night she had nothing to lose—nothing, it seemed to her, to hope. She scarcely looked at

the man. "As you please," she said dully. "What do you want?"

"To speak to you."

"Come in then," she said.

She did not turn to him again until they stood together in the room above, and the door was shut. Then she asked him a second time what he wanted.

"Are we alone?" he returned, staring suspiciously about him.

"My daughter is above," she answered. "There is no one else in the house."

"And you are poor?"

She shrugged her shoulders indifferently, and by a movement of her hands seemed to put the room in evidence; one or two pictures, standing on easels, and a few common painter's properties redeemed it from utter bareness, utter misery, yet left it cold and faded.

Nevertheless, his next question took her by surprise. "What rent do you pay?" he asked harshly.

"What rent?" she repeated, shaken out of her moodiness.

"Yes. How many crowns?"

"Twenty," she answered mechanically. What was his aim? What did he want?

"A year?"

"Yes, a year."

The man had a round shaven whitish face that

sat in the circle of a tightly tied Steinkirk cravat, like an ivory ball in a cup; and short hair, that might on occasion line a periwig. Notwithstanding his pistol, he had rather the air of a tradesman than a soldier until you met his eyes, which flashed with a keen glitter that belied his smug face and shaven cheeks. Those eyes caught the widow's eyes as he answered her, and held them.

"Twenty crowns a year," he said. "Then listen. I will give you two hundred crowns for this house —for one night."

"For this house for one night?" she repeated, thinking she had not heard aright.

"For this house, for one night!" he answered.

Then she understood. She was quick-witted, she had lived long in the house and knew it. Without more she knew that God or the devil had put that which she sought into her hands; and her first impulse was to pure joy. The thirst for vengeance welled up, hot and resistless. Now she could be avenged on all; on the hard-hearted tyrant who had rejected her prayer, on the sleek dames who would point the finger at her child, on the smug town that had looked askance at her all these years—that had set her beyond the pale of its dull grovelling pleasures, and shut her up in that lonely House on the Wall! Now—now she had it in her hand to take tenfold for one. Her face so shone at the thought that the man watching her felt a touch of misgiving; though he was of

the boldest or he had not been there on that errand.

"When?" she said. "When?"

"To-morrow night," he answered. And then, leaning forward, and speaking lightly but in a low voice, he went on, "It is a simple matter. All you have to do is to find a lodging and begone from here by sunset, leaving the door on the latch. No more; for the money it shall be paid to you, half to-night and half the day after to-morrow."

"I want no money," she said.

"No money?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"No, no money," she answered, in a tone and with a look that silenced him.

"But you will do it?" he said, almost with timidity.

"I will do it," she answered. "At sunset to-morrow you will find the door on the latch and the house empty. After that see that you do your part!"

His eyes lightened. "Have no fear," he said grimly. "But mark one thing, mistress," he continued. "It is an odd thing to do for nothing."

"That is my business!" she cried, with a flash of rage.

He had been about to warn her that during the next twenty-four hours she would be watched, and that on the least sign of a message passing between her and those in authority the plot would be abandoned. But at that look he held his

peace, said curtly that it was a bargain then; and in a twinkling he was gone, leaving her—leaving her alone with her secret.

Yet for a time it was not of that or of her vengeance that she thought. Her mind was busy with the years of solitude and estrangement she had passed in that house and that room; with the depression that little by little had sapped her husband's strength and hope, with the slow decay of their goods, their cheerfulness, even the artistic joys that had at first upheld them; with the aloofness that had doomed her and her child to a dreary existence; with this last great wrong.

"Yes, let it be! let it be!" she cried. In fancy she saw the town lie below her—as she had often seen it with the actual eye from the ramparts—she saw the clustering mass of warm red roofs and walls, the outlying towers, the church, the one long straight street; and with outstretched arm she doomed it—doomed it with a vengeful sense of the righteousness of the sentence.

Yet, strange to say, that which was uppermost in her mind and steeled her soul and justified the worst, was not the last thing of which she had to complain—her daughter's wrong—but the long years of loneliness, the hundred, nay, the thousand, petty slights of the past, bearable at the time and in detail, but intolerable in the retrospect now hope was gone. She dwelt on these, and the thought of what was coming filled her

with a fearful joy. She thought of them, and took the lamp and passed into the next room, and, throwing the light on the rough face of brickwork that closed the great window, she eyed the cracks eagerly, and scarcely kept her fingers from beginning the work. For she understood the plot. One man working silently within, in darkness, could demolish the wall in an hour; then a whistle, rope ladders, a line of men ascending, and before midnight the house would vomit armed men, the nearest gate would be seized, the town would lie at the mercy of the enemy!

Presently she had to go to her daughter, but the current of her thoughts kept the same course. The girl was sullen, and lay with her face to the wall, and gave short answers, venting her misery after the common human fashion on the one who loved her best. The mother bore it, not as before with the patience that scorned even to upbraid, but grimly, setting down each peevish word to the score that was so soon to be paid. She lay all night beside her child, and in the small hours heard her weep and felt the bed shake with her unhappiness, and carried the score farther; nay, busied herself with it, so that day and the twittering of sparrows and the booming of the early guns took her by surprise. Took her by surprise, but worked no change in her thoughts.

She was so completely under the influence of the idea, that she felt no fear; the chance of discovery,

and the certainty that if discovered she would be done to death without mercy, did not trouble her in the least. She went about her ordinary tasks until late in the afternoon; then, without preface or explanation, she told her daughter that she was going out to seek a lodging.

The girl was profoundly astonished. "A lodging?" she cried, sitting up. "For us?"

"Yes," the mother answered coldly. "For whom do you think?"

"And you will leave this house?"

"Yes."

"But when?"

"To-night."

"Leave this house—for a lodging—to-night?" the girl faltered. She could not believe her ears. "Why? What has happened?"

Then the woman, in the fierceness of her mood, turned her arms against her child. "Need you ask?" she cried bitterly. "Do you want to go on living in this house—in this house, which was your father's? To go in and out at this door, and meet our neighbours and talk with them on these steps? To wait here—here, where every one knows you, for the shame that will come? For the man who will never come?"

The girl sank back, shuddering and weeping. The woman covered her head and went out, and presently returned; and in the grey of the evening, which within the walls fell early, the two left the

house, the elder carrying a bundle of clothes, the younger whimpering and wondering. Stupefied by the suddenness of the movement, and her mother's stern purpose, she did not observe that they had left the door on the latch, and the House on the Wall unguarded.

The people with whom they had found a lodging, a little room under the sharply sloping tiles, knew them by name and sight—that in so small a place was inevitable—but found nothing strange in the woman's reason for moving; she said that at home the firing broke her daughter's rest. The housewife indeed could sympathize with her, and did so. "I never go to bed myself," she said roundly, "but I dream of those wretches sacking the town, and look to awake with my throat cut."

"Tut—tut!" her husband answered angrily. "You will live to wag your tongue and make mischief a score of years yet. And for the town being sacked, there is small chance of that—in these days."

The elder of his new lodgers repeated his words. "Small chance of that?" she said mechanically. "Is that so?"

The man looked at her with patronage. "Little or none," he said. "If we have to cry Enough, we shall cry it in time, and on terms you may be sure; and they will march in like gentlemen, and an end of it."

"But if it happen at night?" the woman asked curiously. She felt a strange compulsion to put the question. "If they should take us by surprise? What then?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Well, then, of course, things might be different," he said. "But, sho! it won't happen. No fear!" he continued hastily, and in a tone that belied his words. "And you, wife, get back to your pots and leave this talking! You frighten yourself to death with imaginings!"

The woman from the House on the Wall went upstairs to her garret. She did not repent of what she had done; but a sense of its greatness began to take hold of her, and whether she would or not, she found herself waiting—waiting and watching for she alone knew what. Given a companion less preoccupied with misery and she must have been suspected. But the girl lay moodily on her bed, and the widow was at liberty to stand at the window with her hands spread on the sill, and look, and listen, and look, and listen, unwatched. She could not see the street, for below their dormer the roof ran down steeply a yard or more to the eaves; but she had full command of the opposite houses, and at one of the windows a young girl was dressing herself. The woman watched her plait her fair hair, looking sideways the while at a little mirror; and saw her put on a poor necklace and remove it again and try a piece of rib-

bon. Gradually the watcher became interested; from interest she passed to speculation, and wondered with a slight shudder how this girl would fare between that and morning. And then the girl looked up and met the woman's eyes with the innocence of her own—and the woman fell back from the window as if a hand had struck her.

She went no more after that to the window; but until it was quite dark she sat in a chair with her hands on her lap, forcing herself to quietude, as women will, where men would tramp the floor unceasingly. When it was quite dark she trimmed and lit the lamp, and still she did not repent. But she listened more and more closely, and with less concealment. And the face of the girl preening herself at her poor mirror returned again and again, and troubled her. She could contemplate the fate of the town as a whole, and say, let it be! Ay, in God's name let it be! But the one face seen at a window, the one case brought home to her, clung to her mind, and pricked and pained her—dully.

By-and-by she heard the clock strike ten, and her daughter, turning feverishly on the bed, asked her peevishly when she was going to lie down. "Presently," she answered, "presently." And still she sat and listened, and still the girl's face haunted her. She began to picture in detail the thing for which she was waiting. She fancied that she could hear the first alert, followed by single

cries, these by a roar of alarm, this by the wild rush of feet; then she heard the crashing volley, the rattle of hoofs on the pavement, the whirl of the flight through the streets, the shouts of "Germany! Germany!" as the troops swept in triumphant! And then—ah, then!—she heard the things that would follow, the crashing in of doors, the sudden glare of flames, the screams of men driven to the wall, the yells of drunken Saxons, the shrieks of women, the——

No more! No more! She could not bear it. With a shudder she stood erect, and looked about her—wildly. The lamp burned low, her daughter was asleep. With a swift movement the mother caught up a shawl that lay beside the bed, and turned to the door.

Alas, too late. She had repented, but too late. With her hand on the latch, her foot on the threshold, she stood, arrested by a low distant cry that caught her ear, and swelled even as she listened to it, into a roar of many voices rousing the town. What was it? Alas, she knew; she knew, and cowered against the door white-faced and shaking. A moment passed, and the alarm, after sinking, rose again, and now there was no doubt of its meaning. Shod feet pattered through the streets, windows clattered up noisily; a wild medley of voices broke out, and again in a few seconds was lost in the crashing sound of the very volley she had foreheard!

From that moment it seemed to her that hell was broken loose in the town; and she had loosed it! She could no longer, in the din that rose from the street, distinguish one sound from another; but the crash of distant cannon, the heavy tramp of feet near at hand, the screams and cries and shouting, the blare of trumpets, all rose in a confused babel of sounds that shook the very houses, and blanched the cheeks and drove the blood to the heart. The woman, cowering against the door, covered her ears, and groaned. Her horror at what she had done was so great, that she did not heed what was passing near her, nor give a thought to the child in the same room with her until the latter's voice struck her ear, and she turned and found her daughter standing in the middle of the floor, her hand to her breast, and her eyes wide. Then the mother awoke in her again; with pallid shaking lips she cried to her to lie down—to lie down, for there was no danger.

But the girl raised her hand for silence. "Hush!" she said. "I hear a step! It is his! It is his! And he is coming to me! Mother, he is coming to me!"

The mother imagined that terror had turned the girl's brain; it was inconceivable that in that roar of sound a single step could make itself heard, or be recognized. And she tried, in a voice that shook with horror and remorse, to repeat her

meaningless words of comfort. But they died on her lips, died still-born, as the door flew open, and a man rushed in, gazed an instant, then caught her child in his arms.

It was the Burgomaster's son!

The woman from the House on the Wall leaned an instant against the door-post, gazing at them. Little by little as she looked the expression in her eyes changed, and they took the cold, fixed, distant look of a sleep-walker. A moment and she drew a shuddering breath, and turned and went out, and, groping in the outside darkness for the balustrade, went unfaltering into the street.

A part of the garrison happened to be retreating that way at the time. A few were still turning to fire at intervals; but the greater number were hurrying along with bent heads, keeping close to the houses, and intent only on escaping. Reaching the middle of the roadway she stood there like a rock, her face turned in the direction whence the fugitives were hastening.

Presently she saw that for which she waited. In the reek of smoke about the burning gate, towards which she looked—and the flames of which filled the street with a smoky glare—the glitter of steel shone out; and in a moment, rank on rank, a dense column of men appeared, marching shoulder to shoulder. She watched them come nearer and nearer, filling the street from wall to wall, until she could see the glare of their eyes; then

with a cry which was lost in the tumult she rushed on the bayonets.

With eyes shut, with arms open to receive the thrust. But the man whom she had singled out—for one she had singled out—dropped his point with an oath, and dealt her a buffet with butt and elbow that flung her aside unhurt. A second did the same, and a third, until, bandied from one to another, she fell against the wall, breathless and dizzy, but unhurt.

The column swept on; and she rose. She had escaped—by a miracle, as it seemed to her. But despair still held her, and the roar of a mine exploding not far off, the stunning report of which was followed by heartrending wails, drove her again on her fate. She had not far to look, for hard on the foot followed a troop of dragoons. The horses, excited by the fire and the explosion, were plunging in every direction; and even as the crazed woman's eyes alighted on them one fell and threw its rider. It seemed to her that she saw her doom; and, darting from the wall, she flung herself before them.

What was one woman on such a night, in such an inferno? The torrent of iron, remorseless, unchecked, thundered over her and drove on along the street. It seemed impossible that she should have escaped. Yet when some came to look to the fallen soldier—whose neck was broken—the woman beside him rose unhurt and without a scratch, and

staggered to the wall. There she leaned one moment to recover her breath and shake off her giddiness, and a second to think; then with a new expression on her face, an expression between hope and fear, she took her way weakly along the street. The first turning on the right, the second on the left brought her unmolested—for the enemy were quelling the last resistance in the Square—to the front of the House on the Wall. She looked up eagerly and saw that the windows were dark; looked at the door, and by the light of the distant fire saw that it was closed.

Still she scarcely dared to hope that the thing was true; that thing which her miraculous escape had suggested to a mind almost unhinged. It took her more than a minute to mount the steps and push the heavy door open, and satisfy herself that in the outer room at least all was as she had left it. A spark of fire still glowed on the hearth; she groped her way to it, and blew it into a flame; and with shaking hands she lit a spill of wood and waved it above her head, then held it.

Yes, here all was as she had left it. But in the farther room—*the* room? What would she find there? She stared at the door and dared not open it; then with a desperate hand tore it open, and stood on the threshold.

Yes, and here! Here, too, all was as she had left it. She waved the little brand above her head heedless of the sparks, waved it until it flamed

high and cast a light into every corner. But the searcher's eyes sought only one thing, saw only one thing, and that was the mask of brickwork that blocked the great window.

It was untouched! It was untouched! She had hoped as much for the last five minutes; for everything, the closed door, the unchanged room had pointed to it. Yet now that she was assured of it, and knew for certain that she had not done the thing—that guilty as she had been in will, not one life lost that night lay at her door, not one outrage, she fell on her face and wept—wept, though it was the sweetest moment of her life, prayed though she sought nothing but to thank God—prayed and wept with childish cries of gratitude, until the light at her side went out and left her in darkness, and through a rift in the masonry a single star peered in at her.

In Huymonde there was wailing enough that night; ruin and loss, and a broadcasting of life-long sentences of penury. One fell to the Burgomaster's lot; and had she still aught against him—but she had not—the score was paid. And many prayed, and a few, when morning came, and showed their roofs still standing, gave thanks. But to this woman prostrate through the hours on the floor of the forsaken House on the Wall, all that night was one long prayer and thanksgiving. For she had passed through the fire, the smell of the singeing was on her garments, and yet she was saved.

HUNT, THE OWLER

(1696)

Something more than two centuries ago—and just two years after Queen Mary's death—when William the Third had been eight years on the throne, and the pendulum of public sentiment, accelerated by the brusqueness of his manners and no longer retarded by his consort's good nature, was swinging surely and steadily to the Stuart side, the discovery of a Jacobite plot to assassinate the King on his return from hunting set back the balance with a shock which endured to the end of his reign.

It was the King's habit to go on Saturdays in his coach to Richmond Park, returning to Kensington in the evening; and the scheme, laid bare, was to fall upon him in a narrow lane leading from the river to Turnham Green, where the miry nature of the ground rendered his progress slow. For complicity in this plot nine persons, differing much in rank, from Sir John Fenwick, who had been Colonel of King Charles's Life Guards, to Keyes, a private in the Blues, suffered on the scaffold; and for a time all England rang with it. The informers, Porter and Goodman, were viewed with an abhorrence hardly less than that

which the plot itself excited in honest circles; and in this odium a man shared in some small degree, who, though he had not been a party to the plot, had stooped, under the stress of confinement and the fear of death, to give some evidence.

This was James Hunt, the Owler, or smuggler, a name forgotten now, famous then. For years his house, in a lonely situation in the dreariest part of Romney Marsh, had been the favourite house of call for Jacobites bound for St. Germains or returning thence. At regular intervals, if wind and tide served, a packet-boat ran between it and the French coast, and between whiles the hiding-places in his rambling old house, which had been originally contrived to hold runlets of Nantz and bales of Lyons, lodged men whose faces were known in the Mall and St. James's, and whose titles were not less real because for the nonce they wore them, with their stars, in their pockets. Naturally, in the general break-up consequent on the discovery of the Turnham Green plot, these practices came to light, the lonely house in the marshes was entered, and Hunt was himself seized and conveyed to London under a strong guard. There he lay in the Marshalsea until, by discovering the names of certain persons who had used his hiding-places, he was permitted to ransom his life.

When all was told he was of no further use to the Government. He was released, and one fine

morning in September, '96, he walked out of his prison a morose and lonely man. Resolute and daring by nature, but accustomed to live in the open, with the sound of the lark in his ears, it was only in the solitude of his cell that he had fallen below himself. Now, under the open sky, he paid the penalty in a load of shame and remorse. His feet carried him to the Jacobite house of call in Maiden Lane, whither he had directed his nag to be sent; but on his arrival at the inn his eye told him that the place was changed. The ostler, who had been his slave, looked askance at him, the landlord, once his obedient servant, turned his back. He was no longer Mr. Hunt, of Romney, but Hunt the Approver, Hunt the Evidence. Flinging down a crown and a curse he rode desperately out of the yard, and made haste to leave London behind him.

But in the country it was little better. At inns on the Dover road, where he had swaggered in old days the hero of a transparent mystery, and only less admired than the famous Mr. Birkenhead, the Jacobite post, whom even the Tower failed to confine—at these his reception was now cold and formal; and presently the man's heart and hopes went forward and settled hungrily on the two things left to him in this changed world, his home in the marshes and his girl. His heart cried home! The slighting looks of men who would have succumbed to a tithe of his tempta-

tions, would not reach him there; there—he had a reason for believing it—he would still read love and welcome in his child's eyes.

He was so far from having a turn for sentiment that the gibbet at Dartford, though he had lain down and risen up for weeks under the shadow of the gallows, caused him no qualms as he passed under it; nor the man who hung in chains upon it. But when he rode up to the tavern at the last stage short of Romney and saw Trot Eubank, the Romney apothecary, loitering before the house, he drove an oath through his closed teeth.

The man of drugs was too distant to hear it; nevertheless he smiled, and not pleasantly. The apothecary had red cheeks and a black wig, and a splayed face that promised heartiness. His small fishy eyes, however, with a cast in them that was next door to a squint, belied the promise. He came up to Hunt's stirrup and gave him joy of his freedom very loudly. "And you will find all well at home," he continued. "All well and hearty."

Hunt thanked him coldly, watered his horse, and drank a cup of ale with the landlord; who looked at him pitifully, as at a man once admirable and now fallen. Then he climbed into his saddle again and started briskly. But he had not ridden a hundred paces before Eubank, on his old white mare, was at his side. "My way is your way," said he.

Hunt grunted, and wondered how long that had been so; for New Romney, where the apothecary lived, lay to the right. But he said nothing.

"They have quartered three soldiers on you," Eubank continued, squinting out of the corner of one eye to mark the effect of his words, "and an officer."

The smuggler checked his horse. "As if I had not done enough for them!" he cried bitterly.

"Umph!" said the apothecary, drily, and with meaning. "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! Eh, Mr. Hunt?"

He spoke below his breath, but Hunt caught the words and turned on him, his face blazing with rage. "You dirty tar-mixer!" he cried, flinging caution to the winds. "What do you mean? And how dare you ride out to meet me? If you have anything to say, say it, and begone."

"Softly, softly, Mr. Hunt," Eubank answered, his face a shade paler. "You know what I mean. There was a name wanting in your evidence—in your deposition. A name lacking, d'ye take me?"

"A name?"

"Ay, Mr. Fayle's. And Mr. Fayle is missing, too. But I don't think," the apothecary continued cunningly, his eyes gazing far apart, "that he is in France. I think that he is nearer Romney. And that is why they have quartered three soldiers on you."

"You villain!" Hunt cried, his voice shaking

with passion. "This is your work." And he raised his heavy riding-whip, and made as if he would ride the other down. The two were alone on the marsh.

But quick as thought Eubank lugged a pistol from his holster and levelled it.

"Softly, Mr. Hunt," he said. "Softly! I warn you, if anything happens to me, it is known who is with me. Besides, I mean you no harm."

"And no good," said the smuggler, between his teeth. "What do you want?"

"What I have always wanted," the other answered. "Is there any harm in wanting a wife?" he added, a whine in his voice.

"Yes, when she does not want you," Hunt retorted.

"She will want me—when the other is out of the way," the apothecary answered sullenly.

"Out of the way?"

"Ay; in France, or—there!"—and the apothecary nodded towards the gibbet on Dymchurch Flat, which they were just approaching. "It is for her to choose," he added softly. "This side or that!"

"How?"

"If she takes me, Fayle may go hang, or cross the water, or as you please, so that he go far enough. But if she will have him——"

"Well?" Hunt said; for Eubank paused, squinting horribly.

"She will marry him there!" the apothecary answered, pointing to the gibbet.

"Ay?"

"I know that he is here," Eubank continued, his voice low, "and he cannot escape me. She has bubbled the soldiers; they do not know him. And for aught I know he goes out and in, and no one is the wiser. And the game may be played as long as you please. But from to-day I am there."

"You!" Hunt cried.

"To be sure," Eubank answered, letting his ill-concealed triumph appear. "At the farm. I am the officer. Ah, would you? Mr. Hunt, back! Back, or I fire."

The smuggler, on the impulse of the moment, had gone near to striking him down; in face of the pistol and common-sense he lowered his hand, cursed him, and bade him keep his distance for the cur he was; and so with the width of the track between them the two rode on, like dogs ill-coupled, Eubank keeping a squinting watch on Hunt's movements, Hunt with his face hard set, and a gleam of fear in his eyes.

A little later he spied his daughter waiting and watching for him, on the dyke near the farm—a lissom, graceful figure, with wind-blown hair and skirts, visible half a mile away. Possibly he wished then that he had struck hard and once while the man and he were alone on the Marsh. But it was too late. She was there, and in a mo-

ment the meeting so long and tenderly anticipated was over, and the girl, gently disengaging herself with wet cheeks from his arms, turned to his companion.

"You may go, Mr. Eubank," she said austerely. "We do not need you. My father is at home now."

But the apothecary, cringing and smiling, faltered that he was—that he was coming to the house.

The words were barely audible, for his courage, not his malice, failed him under her eyes. At any rate she did not understand. "To our house?" she said.

"Yes," he answered, mouthing nervously, and looking his meanest, in his vain endeavour to appear at ease.

Still she did not comprehend, and she looked to her father for light. "Mr. Eubank is quartered on us," he said grimly.

And then for certain he wished that he had closed with the man while they were alone; and had taken the chance of what might follow, pistol or no pistol. For he saw the healthy brown of sun and wind fade from her cheeks, and her grey eyes dilate with sudden terror; and he read in these signs the perfect confirmation of the misgiving he had begun to entertain. He knew as certainly as if she had told him that Mr. Fayle, of Fawlcourt, was hidden at the farm. And what was worse,

that Eubank, if he had eyes, could not fail to know it also.

It was a relief to all three when a soldier sauntered into sight, mooning up the path from the farm, and civilly greeting the owner, said something about drinking his health. No further words passed then between them, but all moved together towards the house, each avoiding the other's eyes. The threshold reached, there was a momentary pause, the girl looking full at the intruder with a flame of passion in her face, as if she defied him to enter. But Eubank's eyes were lowered, he saw nothing, and with a smirk, and a poor show of making apology, he went in.

Hunt thought of force, and weighed the odds in his mind. But fresh from prison, under the ban of Government, and with a wholesome dread of the Marshalsea, he shrank from the attempt. And matters, once they were in the house, went so quietly, that he began to fancy that he had been mistaken. For one thing, the girl sought no private word with him, was obtrusively public, and once gripped the nettle danger in a way that startled him. It was at the evening meal. Eubank, ill at ease and suspicious, was stealing glances this way and that, his one eye on the settle that screened the entrance, the other on the staircase door that led to the upper floor. On a sudden she rose as if she must speak or choke. "Mr. Eubank," she cried, "you are here to hunt down

Mr. Fayle! You think that he is in my room! My room! I read it in your eyes, you cur! You traitor!"

"Hush!" Hunt said in warning. This was no open fight such as he had dared a score of times; and the malice in the man's face frightened him.

"But, I will speak!" she cried, fighting with her passion. "He thinks it, and he shall search! Go—go now! Leave your men here, sir, to watch, and do you see for yourself that he is not there! And then leave the house!"

He was not at all for going to search, and cringed and muttered an apology; but she would have him, and as good as forced him. Then, when he had searched as much as he pleased—and it was little, with her burning eyes watching him from the doorway—she brought him down again and bade him go. "Go!" she cried.

"I never thought that he was there," he said slyly, smiling at the floor. And of course he did not go, and she could not make him; and the desperate attempt failed as hopelessly as her father could have told her it would.

The whole position was strange. The tall clock ticked in the corner of the great warm panelled kitchen; where the fire shone cosily on delft and pewter, and on the china dogs and Nankin idols that skippers, bringing cargoes of Hollands and Mechlin, had given to the Owler's daughter. Through the open window the belated bees could

be heard among the hollyhocks, and a frugal swallow hawked to and fro for flies. The quiet that falls on a farm in the evening lay on everything.

But within was a difference. There, to say nothing of the soldiers, who, irritated by Eubank's supervision, hung about the open windows listening sullenly, the three never ceased to watch and observe one another, ready to spring, ready to fall back at a sign. Of all, perhaps, Hunt was most mystified. He knew that in the search which had attended his arrest the premises had been ransacked from roof to cellar; that every locker and hiding-place had been laid open and discovered; and that apart from this Eubank, who had played jackal in many of his adventures, was familiar with all, even the most secret. Where, then, was Fayle?

He learned only too soon. When it came to closing time, "Your woman is not in," said one of the soldiers; and he looked at the girl.

"Woman?" said Eubank, with meaning; "I have seen no woman."

"She was here at mid-day," the man answered, without suspicion.

Perhaps the girl had been expecting it, for she did not blench, though Eubank's eyes were on her face. "Then leave the door on the latch," she said; and she added, with fine contempt, "If

a wench has a lover you need not tell the town!"

She went upstairs with that, and Hunt, who was tired and mystified and in a poor humour—things at home promising to turn out as ill as matters abroad, went to his den off the kitchen and shut himself in to sulk. For the use of Eubank and the soldiers two pallets had been laid in a room on the farther side of the kitchen if they chose to use them; but with the door on the latch Hunt had a shrewd suspicion that they would sit up and watch. They soon fell silent, however, and though the remembrance of the events which had happened since he last lay there kept him long waking, and in miserable mood, he heard neither voices nor movements. For himself he was sick at heart thinking of the girl and her lover, and furious at the treachery of the hound who pursued her. Nevertheless, Nature would have its way, and he was in the act of sinking into slumber when a cry which pierced the night and was followed by a discord of voices, raised in sharp contention, brought him startled to his feet.

He had little doubt that Eubank and his men had seized Fayle in the act of entering the house; and enraged, yet bitterly aware of his impotence, he huddled on some clothes, and in a twinkling was out of his room. But in the kitchen, of which the outer door stood wide open to the night, was only Eubank; who, without his wig,

and with a pistol poised in his uncertain hand, had entrenched himself in the angle between the settle and the hearth. The smuggler, seeing no one else, vented his wrath on him.

"You dog!" he cried. "Are honest men to be kept awake by such as you? What does this mean?"

"It means that we have got your fine son-in-law!" the other retorted with venom. "And we are going to keep him. So your distance, if you please. I know you of old, and if you come within a yard of me I will put a ball into you. Now mark that!"

"You have got him?" said Hunt, restraining himself with difficulty. "Where?"

"They are bringing him," Eubank answered. "You will see him soon enough." And then, as one of the soldiers appeared in the doorway, "Have you got him?" the apothecary cried eagerly.

"Ay, ay," the man said.

"But where is he?"

"Hughes and Lort are bringing him."

"Are they enough?" Eubank cried anxiously.

"Plenty," the soldier answered with some scorn. "He made no fight."

"I'll lay you caught him under her window?" Eubank returned, licking his lips.

The man nodded; then stood twiddling his cap, and looking ashamed of himself. For Kate Hunt

had just appeared at the open staircase door, and thence, raised a step above the floor, with a hand on each post, was taking in the scene.

Eubank—who did not see her—chuckled. "I thought so," he said, with an evil grin; and between his bald head and his vile triumph he looked as ugly as sin itself. "I knew he would be there. She did not deceive me, with her door on the latch!"

Pistol, or no pistol, Hunt nearly fell upon him. The owler only refrained because he became aware of his daughter's presence, and to his great bewilderment read in her face not horror or misery, but a strange passionate relief. He turned from her—they were bringing in the prisoner. It was no surprise to him when Eubank, with a howl of consternation, stepped back almost into the fire. "You fools!" the apothecary cried, all his malignity appearing in his face, "that is not the man! That is not——"

"Mr. Fayle?" said the prisoner coolly. "No, it is not. And yet, Mr. Eubank, I think you know me. Or, you should know me. You have seen me often enough."

The apothecary stared, started, drew a deep breath of relief, and was himself again. "Yes, I know you—Mr. Birkenhead," he said. "I have lost Fayle, but I have won a thousand guineas. Lads!" he continued, raising his voice almost to a scream, "we have shot at the pigeon and killed

the crow! We have killed the crow! It is Birkenhead, the Post—the Jacobite Post! And there is a thousand guineas on his head!"

Hunt gathered himself together. "Mr. Birkenhead," he said, "we are two to four, but say the word, and——"

"I'll say a word for you presently," the Jacobite answered with a quick look of acknowledgment, "where we are going. But first, to show Mr. Eubank that he is more lucky than he thinks, and has caught his pigeon as well as his crow. Fayle," he continued, raising his voice, "come in!"

A gawky, long-limbed woman stalked in, smiling grimly at Eubank, but with the tail of his eye on the girl in the doorway. Eubank drew back, and the colour faded from his cheeks. He breathed hard, and the pistol in his hand wavered. "Look here," he began. "Let us talk about this."

But the Jacobite raised his hand for silence. "Dewhurst!" he cried.

A tall, swarthy seaman, with a scarred cheek and a knitted nightcap, stepped briskly in, a cutlass in his hand.

"Fawcus!"

Another entered, who but for the scar might have been his twin.

"Bonaventure! And Mr. Eubank," Birkenhead continued, lowering his voice and speaking with treacherous civility, "let me warn you not to be too free with that pistol, for these good fellows

will assuredly put you on the fire if any one is hurt. Is Bonaventure there? Yes. Moyreau? Yes. Valentin? I am sure that you understand me, Mr. Eubank. You will be careful."

But the warning was needless. As man after man filed in and formed up before him—all armed to the teeth, and all wild, reckless fellows in sea-boots, nightcaps, and tarry jerkins—Eubank's craven heart melted within him. Setting his pistol down on the settle, he stood speechless, sallow, shaking with fear, such fear as almost stays the heart, yet leaves the brain working—leaves the man created in God's image to be dragged out to his death, writhing and shrieking—a sight to haunt brave men's memories.

He was spared that, yet came near to it. "Mr. Eubank," said Birkenhead sternly, "you will come with me. I have a sloop at the old landing-place, and before daylight we shall be in Calais roads. There is a cell in the Bastille waiting for you, and I shall see you in it. I'll hold you a hostage for Bernardi."

The wretch shrieked and fell on his knees and grovelled, crying for mercy; but Birkenhead only answered, "Get up, man, get up; or must my men prick you?" And then to the others, "Mr. Hunt," he continued, "you too must come with us. But have no fear. Believe me you will be better there than here, and shall be well reported. Mr. Fayle and your daughter will come, of course.

Tie the others and leave them. And hurry, men, hurry. Bring your money, Mr. Hunt; King James has none too much of that. I can give you ten minutes to pack, and then we must be moving lest they take the alarm in Romney."

As a fact they took no alarm in Romney. But a shepherd, belated that night with a sick ewe, saw a long line of lanthorns go bobbing across the marsh to the sea, and went home and told his neighbours that Hunt was at his old tricks again. One of them, knowing that the soldiers were there, laughed in his face and went to see, and learning the truth carried the story into Romney, whence it spread to London and brought down a mob of horse and foot and messengers, and from one end of England to the other the descent and the audacity of it were a nine days' wonder. However, by that time the nest was cold and the birds long flown, and Birkenhead, with one more plume in his crest, was preening his feathers at St. Germains.

THE TWO PAGES

(1580)

Yes, I have seen changes. When I first served at court, whither I went in the year 1579—seven years after the St. Bartholomew—the King received all in his bedchamber, and there every evening played primero with his intimates, until it was time to retire; Rosny and Biron, and the great men of the day, standing, or sitting on chests round the chamber. If he would be more private he had his cabinet; or, if the matter were of prime importance, he would take his confidants to an open space in the garden—such as the white-mulberry grove, encircled by the canal at Fontainebleau; where, posting a Swiss guard who did not understand French, at the only bridge that gave access to the place, he could talk without reserve.

In those days the court rode, or if sick, went in litters. Coaches were only coming into fashion, Henry, who feared nothing else, having so invincible a distaste for them that he was wont to turn pale if the coach in which he travelled swayed more than usual. Ladies, the Queen's mother and her suite excepted, rode sideways on pads, their feet supported by a little board; and side-saddles were rare. At great banquets the fairest and

noblest served the tables. We dined at ten in the country and eleven in Paris; instead of at noon, as is the custom now.

When the King lay alone, his favourite pages took it by turns to sleep at his feet; the page on duty using a low truckle bed that in the daytime fitted under the King's bed, and at night was drawn out. Not seldom, however, and more often if the times were troublous, he would invite one of his councillors to share his couch, and talk the night through with him; a course which in these days might seem undignified. Frequently he and the Queen received favourite courtiers before they left their beds; particularly on New Year's morning it was the duty of the Finance Minister to wait on them, and awaken them with a present of medals struck for the purpose.

And I recall many other changes. But one thing, which some young sparks, with a forwardness neither becoming in them nor respectful to me, have ventured to suggest, even in my presence—that we who lived in the old war time were a rougher breed and less dainty and chivalrous than the Buckinghams and Bassompierres of to-day—I roundly deny. On the contrary, I would have these to know that he who rode in the wars with Henry of Guise—or against him—had for his example not only the handsomest but the most courtly man of all times; and has nothing to learn from a set of pert fellows who, unable to acquire

the stately courtesy that becomes a gentleman, are fain to air themselves in a dandified-simpering trim of their own, with nought gallant about them but their ribbons and furbelows.

That such are stouter than the men of my day, no one dare maintain. I have seen Crillon, whom veterans called the brave; and I have talked with La Nouë of the Iron Arm; for the rest, I can tell you of one—he was a boy fourteen years old—known to me in my youth, who had it not in him to fear.

He was page, along with me, to the King of Navarre; a year my junior, and my rival. At riding, shooting and fencing he was the better; at paume and tennis he always won. But naturally, being the elder, I had the greater strength, and when the sharp sting of his wit provoked me, I could drub him, and did so more than once. No extremity of defeat, however, no, nor any severity of punishment could wring from Antoine a word of submission; prostrate, with bleeding face, he was as ready to fly at my throat as before I laid hand on him. And more, though I was the senior, he was the life and soul and joy of the ante-chamber; the first in mischief, the last in retreat; the first to cry a nick-name after a burly priest who chanced to pass us as we lounged at the gates—and the first to be whipped when it turned out that the King had a mind to please the clergy.

It followed that from the first I viewed him with

a strange mixture of rivalry and affection; ready at one moment to quarrel with him and beat him for a misword, and the next to let him beat me if it pleased him. At this time the King of Navarre had his court sometimes at Montauban, sometimes at Nerac; and there were rumours of a war between him and the King of France; to be clear, it was this year, that in the hope of maintaining the peace, the latter's mother, the Queen Catherine, came with a glittering train of ladies to Nerac, and paid her court to our King, and there were ball and pageants and gay doings by day and night. But the Huguenots were not lightly taken in, and under this fair mask suspected treachery, and not without reason; for one night, during a ball, Catherine's friends seized a strong town, and but for Henry's readiness—who took horse that moment and before daylight had surprised a town of France to set against it—they would have gained the advantage. So in the event Catherine did little, no one trusting her, and in the end she returned to Paris wiser than she came; but for the time the visit lasted the court gaieties continued, and there were masques and dances, and the thought of war was seemingly far from the minds of all.

Now in the room which was then the King's Chamber at Montauban, is a window, at a great height from the ground, a very deep ravine, which is one of the main defences of the city, lying below

it. In the adjoining ante-chamber is a similar window, and between the two is a projecting buttress, and outside the sill of each is a stone ledge a foot wide, which runs round the buttress. I do not know who first thought of it, but one day when the King was absent and we pages were lounging in the room—which was against the rules, since we should have been in the ante-chamber—some one challenged Antoine to walk on the ledge round the buttress, going out by the one window and returning by the other. I have said that the ledge was but a foot wide, the depth below infinite. It turned me sick only to look down and see the hawks hang and circle in the gulf. Nevertheless, before any could speak, Antoine was outside the casement poising himself on the airy ledge; a moment, and with his face turned inwards to the wall, his slight figure outlined against the sky, he began to edge his way round the buttress.

I called to him to come back; I expected each moment to see him reel and fall; the others, too, stood staring with uneasy faces; for they had not thought that he would do it. But he did not heed; an instant, and he vanished round the buttress, and still we stood, and no one moved; no one moved, until with a shout he showed himself at the other window, and sprang down into the ante-chamber. His eyes were bright with the triumph of it; his hair waved back from his brow as

if the breeze from the gulf still stirred it. He cried to me to do the feat in my turn, he pointed his finger at me, dared me, and before them all he called me "Coward! Coward!"

But I am not ashamed to confess a weakness I share with many men of undoubted courage—I could never face a great height; and though I burned with wrath and shame, and raged under his taunts, though I could have confronted any other form of death, at his instigation, or I thought I could, though I even went so far as to leap on the seat within the window and stand—and stand irresolute—I stopped there. My head turned, my skin crept. I could not do it. The victory was with Antoine; he whom I had thrashed for some impertinence only the night before, now held me up to scorn and drove me from the room with jeers and laughter.

None of the others had greater courage; none dared do the feat; but I was the eldest and the biggest, and the iron entered into my heart. Day after day for a week, whenever the chamber was empty, I crept to the window and looked down and watched the kites hover and drop, and plumbed the depth with my eyes. But only to turn away—sick. I could not do it. Resolve as I might at night, in the morning, on the window ledge, with the giddy deep below me, I was a coward.

One evening, however, when the King was sup-

ping with M. de Roquelaure, and I believed the chamber to be deserted, I chanced to go to the window of the ante-chamber after nightfall. I stepped on the seat—that I had done often before; but this time, looking down, I found that I no longer quailed. The darkness veiled the ravine; to my astonishment I felt no qualms. Moreover, I had had supper, my heart was high; and in a moment it occurred to me that now—now in the dark I could do it, and regain my pride.

I did not give myself time to think, but went straight out to the gallery, where I found Antoine and two or three others teasing Mathurine the woman-fool. My entrance was the signal for a taunt. "Ho, Miss White Face! Come to borrow Mathurine's petticoats?" Antoine cried, standing out and confronting me. "It is you, is it?"

"Yes," I answered sharply, meeting his eyes and speaking in a tone I had not used for a week. "And if you do not mend your manners, Master Antoine——"

"Go round the buttress!" he retorted with a grimace.

"I will!" I answered. "I will! And then——"

"You dare not!"

"Come!" I said; "come, and see! And when I have done it, my friend——"

I did not finish the sentence, but led the way back to the ante-chamber; assuming a courage which, as a fact, was fast oozing from me. The

cold air that met me as I approached the open window sobered me still more; but Antoine's jeers and my companions' incredulity stung me to the necessary point, and at once I stepped on the ledge, and without giving myself time to think, turned my face to the wall and began to edge myself slowly along it; my heart in my mouth, my flesh creeping, as I gradually realized where I was; every nerve in my body strung to quivering point.

Certainly in the daylight I could not have done it. Even now, when the depth over which I balanced myself was hidden by the darkness, and I had only my fancy to conquer, I trembled, my knees shook, a bat skimming by my ear almost caused me to fall; I was bathed in perspiration. The depth drew me; I dared not for my life look into it. Yet I turned the corner of the buttress in safety, and edged my way along its front, glueing myself to the wall; and came at last, breathing hard, to the second corner, and turned it, and saw with a gasp of relief the lights in the chamber. A moment—a moment more, and I should be safe.

At that instant I heard something, and cast a wary eye backwards the way I had come. I saw a shadowy form at my elbow, and I guessed that Antoine was following me. With a shudder I hastened my steps to avoid him, and I was already in the angle formed by the wall and but-

tress—whence I could leap down into the chamber—when he called to me.

"Hist!" he cried softly. "Stop, man! the King is there! He has been there all the time, I think."

I thought it only too likely, for I could see none of our comrades at the window; and I heard men's deeper voices in the room. To go on, therefore, and show myself was to be punished; and I paused and knelt down in the angle where the ledge was wider. I recognized the King's voice, and M. Gourdon's, and that of St. Martin, the captain of the guard; I caught even their words, and presently, in a minute or two, and against my will, I had surprised a secret—so great a secret that I trembled almost as much as I had trembled at the outmost angle of the buttress, hanging between earth and sky. For they were planning the great assault on Cahors; for the first time I heard named those points that are now household words; the walnut grove, and the three gates, and the bridge, that fame and France will never forget. I heard all—the night, the hour, the numbers to be engaged; and turned quaking to learn what Antoine thought of it. Turned, but neither saw nor addressed him; for he had gone back, and my eye, incautiously cast down, saw far, far beneath me a torch and a little group of men—at the bottom of the void. I became giddy at this sudden view of the abyss, wavered an instant, and then with a cry of fear I chose the less

pressing danger, and tumbled forward into the room.

M. de Roquelaure had his point at my throat before I could rise; and I had a vision of half a dozen men part risen, of half a dozen startled faces all glaring at me. Fortunately M. de Rosny knew me and held the other's arm. I was plucked up roughly, and set on my feet before the King, who alone had kept his seat; and amid a shower of threats I was bidden to explain my presence.

"You knave! I wish I had spitted you!" Roquelaure cried, with an oath, when I had done so. "You heard all?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

They scowled at me between wrath and chagrin. "Friend Rosny, you were a fool," M. de Roquelaure said with grimness.

"I think I was," the other answered. "But a flogging, a gag, and the black hole will keep his tongue still as long as is needful."

Henry laughed. "I think we can do better than that!" he said, with a glance of good nature. "Hark you, my lad; you are big enough to fight. We will trust you, and you shall wear sword for the first time. But if the surprise fail, if word of our coming go before us, we shall know whom to blame, and you will have to reckon with M. de Rosny."

I fell on my knees and thanked him with tears; while Rosny and M. St. Martin remonstrated.

"Take my word for it, he will blurt it out!" said the one; and the other, "You had better deliver him to me, sire."

"No," Henry said kindly. "I will trust him. He comes of a good stock; if the oak bends, what tree shall we trust?"

"The oak bends fast enough, sire, when it is a sapling," Rosny retorted.

"In that case you shall apply *your* sapling!" the King answered, laughing. "Hark ye, my lad, will you be silent?"

I promised—with tears in my eyes; and with that, and a mind full of amazement, I was dismissed, and left the presence, a grown man; overjoyed that the greatest scrape of my life had turned out the happiest; foreseeing honour, and rewards, and already scorning the other pages as immeasurably beneath me. It was a full minute before I thought of Antoine, and the chance that he, too, before he turned back, had overheard the King's plan. Then I stood in the passage horrified—my first impulse to return and tell the King. It came too late, however, for in the mean time he and M. de Rosny had repaired to the closet, and the others had withdrawn; and while I stood hesitating, Antoine slipped out of the ante-chamber, and came to me on the stairs.

His first words went some way towards relieving me; they told me that he had overheard something but not all; enough to know that the King

intended to surprise a place of strength, and a few details, but not the name of the place. As soon as I understood this, and that I had nothing to fear from him, I could not hide my triumph. When he declared his intention of going with the expedition, I laughed at him.

"You!" I said. "You don't understand. This is not child's play!"

"And you will not tell me where it is?" he asked, raging.

"No! Go to your nurse and your pap-boat, child."

He flew at me at that like a mad cat, and I had to beat him until the blood ran down his face before I could shake him off. Even then, and while I thrust him out sobbing, he begged me to tell him—only to tell him. Nor was that all. Through all the next day he haunted me and persecuted me, now with prayers and now with threats; following me everywhere with eyes of such hot longing that I marvelled at the irrepressible spirit that shone in the lad.

Of course I told him nothing. Yet I was glad when the next day came, and with it an announcement that Henry would visit M. de Gourdon and lie that night at his house, four miles from Montauban, where the court then was. Only eight gentlemen were invited to be of the party, with as many ladies; the troop with a handful of servants riding out of the city about five o'clock, and no

one the wiser. No one saw anything odd in the visit, nor in my being chosen to attend the King. But I knew; and I was not surprised when we stopped at M. de Gourdon's only to sup, and then getting to horse, rode through the night and the dusky oak woods, by walled farms and hamlets, and under rustling poplars—rode many leagues, and forded many streams. The night was hot, it was the month of June; and it thundered continually, but with no rain. At this point and that bands of men joined us, mysteriously, and in silence; until from the hill with its bracken and walnut trees, we saw the lights of Cahors below us, and the glimmer of the winding Lot, and heard the bells of the city tolling midnight.

By this time, every road adding to our numbers, we were a great company; and how we lay hidden through the early night in the walnut grove that looks down on the river all men know; but not the qualms and eagerness that by turns possessed me as I peered through the leaves at the distant lights, nor the prayer I said that I might not shame my race, nor how my heart beat when Henry, who was that day twenty-seven years old, gave the order to advance in the voice of one going to a ball. Two men with a petard—then a strange invention—led the way through the gloom, attended by ten picked soldiers. After them came fifty of the King's guards, and the King with two hundred foot; then the main body of a thousand.

We had the long bridge with its three gates to pass; and beyond these obstacles, a city bitterly hostile, and occupied by a garrison far outnumbering us. Never, indeed, did men enter on a more forlorn or perilous enterprise.

I remember to this day how I felt as we advanced through the darkness, and how long it seemed while we waited, huddled and silent, at the head of the bridge, expecting the explosion of the petard, which had been fixed to the first gate. At length it burst, filling the heavens with flame; before the night closed down again on our pale faces, the leaders were through the breach and past that gate, and charging madly over the bridge, the leading companies all mingled together.

I had no fear now. If a friendly hand had not pulled me back, I should have run on to the petard which drove in the second gate. As it was, I passed through the second obstacle side by side with the King—but went no farther. The garrison was awake now, and a withering fire from fifty arquebuses swept the narrow bridge; those who were not struck stumbled over the dying; the air was filled with groans and cries; a moment and the very bravest recoiled, and sought safety behind the second gate, where we stood in shelter.

The moment was critical, for now the whole city was aroused. Shouts of triumph rose above the exploding of the guns; in every tower bells jangled

noisily, and on the summit of the last gateway on the bridge, which from every loophole and window poured on us a deadly hail of slugs, a beacon-fire blazed up, turning the black water below us to blood.

I have said that the moment was critical—for France and for us. For a few seconds all hung back. Then St. Martin sprang forward, and by his side Captain Robert, who had fixed the first petard. They darted along the bridge, but only to fall and lie groaning and helpless halfway over. Henry made a movement as if to follow, but young M. de Rosny held him back by force, while half a dozen soldiers made the attempt. Of these four fell at once under the pitiless fire, and two crawled back wounded. It seemed that a man must be more than mortal to pass that space; and while one might count twenty no one moved.

Captain Robert lay scarcely fifteen paces from us, and by his side the hammer, spike, and petard he had carried. He and they were visible in the glow of ruddy light that poured down on the bridge. Suddenly, while I stood panting and irresolute, longing, yet not daring—since I saw older men hang back—suddenly a hand twitched my sleeve, and I turned to find at my elbow, his hair streaming back from his brow, Antoine! The lad's face and eyes flashed scorn at me. He waved his hand towards the bridge.

"Coward!" he cried; and he struck me lightly on the cheek with his hand. "Coward! Now follow me, if you dare!"

And, before any one could stay him, he darted from the shelter of the gateway in which we stood; and raced on to the bridge. I heard a great shout on our side, and the roar of a volley; but dully only, for, enraged by the blow and the challenge, I followed him—I and a dozen others. Some fell, but he ran on, and I after him. He snatched up the petard and the hammer, I the spike. In a moment, as it seemed to me, we were at the farther gate attaching the engine to it. I held the spike, he hammered it; the smoke and the frowning archway, to some extent, protected us from the fire of those above.

I often think of those few seconds with the pride and the garrulousness of an old man. While they lasted we stood alone, separated from our friends by the whole length of the third span of the bridge. For a few seconds only indeed; then, with a yell of triumph, the remains of Henry's "forlorn" rushed forward, and though many fell, enough came on. In a trice eager hands took the engine from us, and secured the fuse effectually and lit it, and bore us back—I was going to say, out of danger; but alas! as a deafening crash and a blaze of light proclaimed the way open and the last gate down, he who had done the deed, and opened the way, fell across me, shot from a loop-

hole! As the rain of fragments from the gate fell hissing and splashing in the stream that flowed below, and while the foot streamed over the bridge, and pressed through the breach, Antoine gave a little gasp, and died on my knee.

The rest all men know; how through five days and nights we fought the great street-fight of Cahors; how we took no rest, save against walls and doorways, or in the courts of houses we had won; how we ate and drank with hands smirched with blood, and then to it again; how we won the city house by house, and foot by foot, until at last the white flag waved from the great tower, and France awoke with a start to know that in the young prince of pleasure, whom she had deemed a trifler, was born the shrewdest statesman and the boldest soldier of all her royal line.

And Antoine? When I went, after many hours, to seek him, the horse had crossed the bridge, and even his body was gone. How he had traced us, how managed to come to the front so opportunely, whether without him the star of Navarre would have risen so gloriously on that night of '80, never to be forgotten, I cannot say. But when I hear men talk of Crillon and courage—above all, when I hear them talk of the fops and ribboned popinjays of to-day, with their loose breeches and their bell-mouthed boots, I think of my comrade and rival who won Cahors for the King. And I smile.

PART II

THE DIARY OF A STATESMAN

THE DIARY OF A STATESMAN

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That which I am about to insert in this place may seem to some to be trifling, and on a parity with the diverting story of M. Boisrosé, which I have set down in an earlier part of my memoirs. But among the calumnies of those who have not since the death of the late King ceased to attack me, the statement that I kept from his Majesty things which should have reached his ears, has had a prominent place; though a thousand times refuted by my friends. I take in hand, therefore, to show by this episode, curious in itself, the full knowledge of affairs which the King had, and to prove that in many matters, which were never permitted to become public, he took a personal share, worthy as much of Haroun as of Alexander.

It was my custom, before I entered upon those negotiations with the Prince of Condé which terminated in the recovery of the estate of Villebon, where I now reside, to spend a part of the autumn and winter at Rosny. On these occasions, I was in the habit of moving from Paris with a considerable train, including not only my Swiss, pages, and grooms, but the maids of honour and waiting-women of the Duchess. We halted to take

dinner at Poissy, and generally contrived to reach Rosny towards nightfall, so as to sup by the light of flambeaux, in a manner enjoyable enough, though devoid of that state which I have ever maintained, and enjoined upon my children, as at once the privilege and burden of rank.

At the time of which I speak, I had for my favourite charger the sorrel horse which the Duke of Mercoeur presented to me with a view to my good offices at the time of the King's entry into Paris; and which I honestly transferred to his Majesty in accordance with a principle laid down in another place. The King insisted on returning it to me, and for several years I rode it on these annual visits to Rosny. What was more remarkable was, that on each of these occasions it cast a shoe about the middle of the afternoon, and always when we were within a short league of the village of Aubergenville. Though I never had with me less than a half a score of led horses, I had such an affection for the sorrel that I preferred to wait until it was shod, rather than accommodate myself to a nag of less easy paces; and would allow my household to precede me, while I stayed behind with at most a guard or two, my valet, and a page.

The forge at Aubergenville was kept by a smith of some skill, a cheerful fellow, whom I rewarded, in view rather of my position than his services, with a gold piece. His joy at receiving what was

to him the income of three months was great, and never failed to reimburse me; in addition to which I took some pleasure in unbending, and learning from this simple peasant and loyal man, what the tax-payers were saying of me and my reforms—a duty I felt I owed to the King my master.

As a man of breeding, it would ill become me to set down the homely truths I thus learned. The conversations of the vulgar are little suited to a nobleman's memoirs. But in this I distinguish between the Duke of Sully and the King's minister; and it is in the latter capacity that I relate what passed on these diverting occasions. "Ho! Simon," I would say, encouraging the poor man as he came bowing before me. "How goes it, my friend?"

"Badly," he would answer, "very badly until your lordship came this way."

"And how was that, little man?"

"Ah, it is the roads!" he always replied, shaking his bald head as he began to set about his business. "The roads since your lordship became Surveyor-General, are so good, that not one horse in a hundred leaves its shoe in a slough! And then there are so few highwaymen, that not one robber's plates do I replace in a twelvemonth! That is where it is."

At this I was highly delighted. "Still, since I began to pass this way times have not been so bad with you, Simon," I would answer.

Thereto he had one invariable reply. "No, thanks to St. Geneviéve and your Lordship, whom we call in this village the poor man's friend, I have a fowl in the pot."

This phrase so pleased me, that I repeated it to the king. It tickled his fancy also, and for many years it was a common remark of that good and great ruler, that he would fain live to see every peasant with a fowl in his pot.

"But why," I remember, I once asked this honest fellow—it was on the last occasion of the sorrel falling lame there—"do you thank St. Geneviéve?"

"She is my patron saint," he answered.

"Then you are a Parisian?"

"Your lordship is always right."

"But does her saintship do you any good?" I asked curiously.

"By your lordship's leave. My wife prays to her, and she loosens the nails in the sorrel's shoes."

"Then she pays off an old grudge," I answered. "There was a time when Paris liked me little. But hark you, Master Smith! I am not sure 'tis not an act of treason to conspire with Madame Geneviéve against the comfort of the King's minister. What think you, you rascal? Can you pass the justice-elm without a shiver?"

This threw the simple fellow into great fear, which the sight of the livre of gold converted into

joy. Leaving him still staring at his fortune, I rode away. But when we had gone some little distance, the aspect of his face, when I charged him with treason, or my own unassisted discrimination, suggested a clue to the phenomenon.

"La Trape," I said to my valet—the same who was with me at Cahors—"what is the name of the inn-keeper at Poissy, at whose house we are accustomed to dine?"

"Andrew, may it please your lordship."

"Ha! Ha! I thought so!" I exclaimed, smiting my thigh. "Simon and Andrew his brother! Answer, knave; and if you have permitted me to be robbed these many times, tremble for your ears! Is he not brother to the smith at Aubergenville who has just shod my horse?"

La Trape professed to be ignorant on the point. But a groom who had stayed with me, having sought my permission to speak, said it was so, adding that Master Andrew had risen in the world through dealings in hay, which he was wont to take into Paris and sell, and that he did not now acknowledge, or see anything of his brother, the smith.

On receiving this confirmation of my suspicion, my vanity as well as my love of justice led me to act with the promptitude which I have exhibited in greater emergencies. I rated La Trape for his carelessness in permitting this deception to be practised; and the main body of my attendants

being now in sight, I ordered him to take two Swiss and arrest both brothers without delay. There remained three hours of daylight, and I judged that by hard riding they might reach Rosny with their prisoners before bedtime.

I spent some time, while still on the road, in considering what punishment I should inflict on the culprits, and finally laid aside the purpose I had at first conceived—of dealing severely with them—in favour of a plan that I thought might offer me some amusement. For the execution of this, I depended upon Maignan, my equerry, a man of lively imagination, and the same who had, of his own motion, arranged and carried out the triumphal procession in which I was borne to Rosny, after the battle of Ivry. Before I sat down to supper, I gave him his directions; and, as I had expected, news was brought to me, while I was at table, that the prisoners were without.

On this, I informed the Duchess and the company—for, as was usual, a number of my country neighbours had come to compliment me on my return—that there was sport of a rare kind on foot; and we adjourned, Maignan and four pages bearing lights before us, to that end of the terrace which abuts on the linden avenue. Here a score of grooms, holding aloft torches, had been arranged in a semicircle, so that they enclosed an impromptu theatre, which was as light as in the day. On a sloping bank at the end of the terrace, seats

had been placed for those who had supped at my table, while the rest of the company found such places of vantage as they could, their number, indeed, amounting, with my household, to two hundred persons. In the centre of the open space a small forge-fire had been kindled, the red glow of which added much to the strangeness of the scene; and on the anvil beside it were ranged a number of horses' and donkeys' shoes, with a full complement of tools used by smiths.

All being ready, I gave the word to bring in the prisoners; and, escorted by La Trape and six of my guards, they were marched into the arena. In their pale and terrified faces, and the shaking limbs which scarce supported them, I read both the consciousness of guilt and the apprehension of immediate punishment; it was plain that they expected nothing less. I was very willing to play with their fears, and for some time looked at them in silence, while all wondered with lively curiosity what would ensue. In the end, I addressed them gravely, telling the innkeeper that I knew well he had loosened each year a shoe of my horse, in order that his brother might profit by the job of replacing it; and then I proceeded to reprove the smith for the ingratitude which had led him to return my bounty by the conception of so knavish a trick.

Upon this they confessed their guilt, and flinging themselves upon their knees, with many tears,

begged for mercy. After a decent interval I permitted myself to be moved.

"Your lives shall be spared," I pronounced. "But punished you must be. I ordain that Simon the smith fit, nail, and properly secure a pair of iron shoes to Andrew's heels, and that then, Andrew, who by that time will have learned somewhat of the smith's art, do the same to Simon. So will you both be taught to avoid such tricks in the future."

It may well be imagined that a judgment so justly adapted to the offence charmed all save the culprits; and in a hundred ways the pleasure of those present was evinced: to such a degree indeed that Maignan had difficulty in restoring gravity to the assemblage. This done, however, Master Andrew was taken in hand, and his wooden shoes removed. The tools of his trade were placed before Simon, but he cast glances so piteous, first at his brother's feet, and then at the shoes, as again gave rise to an amount of merriment that surpassed all, my pages in particular well-nigh forgetting my presence, and rolling about in a manner unpardonable at another time. However, I rebuked them, and was about to order the sentence to be carried into effect, when the remembrance of the many pleasant simplicities which the smith had uttered to me, acting upon a natural disposition to mercy which the most calumnious of my enemies have never questioned, induced me

to give the prisoners a chance of escape. "Listen," I said, "Simon and Andrew. Your sentence has been pronounced and will be executed, unless you can avail yourself of the condition I now offer. You shall have three minutes: if in that time either of you can make a good joke, he shall go free. If not—let a man attend to the bellows, La Trape!"

This charmed my neighbours, who were now well assured that I had not promised them a novel entertainment without good grounds; for the grimaces of the two knaves thus bidden to jest if they would save their skins were so diverting they would have made a nun laugh. The two looked at me with their eyes as wide as plates, and for the whole of the time of grace never a word could they utter save howls for mercy. "Simon," I said gravely, when the time was up, "have you a joke? No. Andrew, my friend, have you a joke? No. Then——"

I was about to order the sentence to be carried out when the innkeeper flung himself again upon his knees and cried out loudly—as much to my astonishment as to the regret of the bystanders, who were bent on seeing so strange a shoeing feat—"One word, my lord! One word! I can give you no joke! But I can do a service, a service to the King! I can disclose a plot, a wicked conspiracy against him!"

I need not say how greatly I was taken aback

by this public announcement. But I had been too long in the King's employment not to have remarked how strangely things are brought to light; and on hearing the man's words, which were followed by a stricken silence, I did not fail to look sharply at the faces of such of those present as it was possible to suspect. I failed, however, to observe any sign of confusion or dismay, or anything more particular than such a statement was calculated to produce. Doubting much whether the man was not playing with me, I then addressed him sternly, warning him to beware lest in his anxiety to save his heels by falsely accusing others, he lose his head. For that, if his conspiracy should prove to be an invention of his own, I should certainly consider it my duty to hang him.

He still persisted, however, in his story, and even added desperately, "It is a plot, my lord, to assassinate you and the King on the same day."

This statement went home; for I had good reason to know that at that time the king had alienated many by his infatuation for Madame de Verneuil; while I had to reckon with all whom my pursuit of his interests injured in reality or appearance. Forthwith I directed that the prisoners should be led in to the chamber adjoining my private closet, and taking the precaution to call my guards about me, since I knew not what attempt despair might not breed, I withdrew myself,

making such apologies to the company as the nature of the case permitted.

I ordered Simon the smith to be first brought before me, and in the presence of Maignan I severely examined him as to his knowledge of any conspiracy. He denied, however, that he had heard of the matters referred to by his brother, and persisted so firmly in the denial that I was inclined to believe him. In the end he was removed and Andrew was brought in. The innkeeper's demeanour was such as I have often observed in intriguers brought suddenly to book. He averred the existence of the conspiracy and that its objects were those which he had stated, and he offered to give up his associates; but he conditioned that he should do this in his own way, undertaking to conduct me and one other person —but no more, lest the alarm should be given—to a place in Paris on the following night, where we could hear the plotters state their plans and designs. In this way only, he urged, could proof positive be obtained.

I was naturally startled by this proposal, and inclined to think it a trap. But more leisurely consideration dispelled my fears. The innkeeper had held no parley with any one save his guards, since his arrest, and could neither have warned his accomplices, nor acquainted them with a design the execution of which depended on his confession to me. In the end, therefore, I accepted his terms

—with a private reservation that I would have help at hand; and before daybreak next morning I left Rosny, which I had only seen by torchlight, with my prisoner and a select body of Swiss. We entered Paris in the afternoon in three parties, with as little parade as possible, and resorted to the Arsenal, whence, as soon as evening fell, I made my way to the King.

A return so sudden and unexpected, was as great a surprise to the Court as to Henry, and I was not slow to mark the discomposure which appeared on more than one face as the crowd in the chamber fell back for me to approach my master. Still, I was careful to remember that this might arise from other causes than guilt. The King received me with his wonted affection; and divining that I must have something important to communicate, he withdrew with me to the farther end of the chamber, where we were out of earshot of the Court. I related the story to his Majesty, keeping back nothing.

He shook his head, saying merely, "The fish, to escape the frying-pan, grandmaster, will jump into the fire. And human nature, save in our case, who can trust one another, is akin to the fishy."

I was touched by the compliment, but not convinced. "You have not seen the man, sire," I said. "And I have had that advantage."

"You believe him?"

"In part," I answered, with caution. "So far as

to be assured that he thinks to save his skin, which he can only save if he be telling the truth. May I beg you, sire," I added, seeing the direction of his glance, "not to look so fixedly at the Duke of Epernon? He grows uneasy."

"'Conscience makes'—you know the rest."

"Nay, sire, with submission," I replied, "I will answer for him; if he be not driven by apprehension to do something reckless."

"I am taking your warranty every day!" my master said, with the grace which came so natural to him. "But now in this matter what would you have me do?"

"Double your guards, sire, for to-night. That is all. I will answer for the Bastille and the Arsenal; and holding these, we hold Paris."

But thereupon the king declared a decision, which I felt it to be my duty to combat with all my influence. He had conceived the idea of being the one to accompany me to the rendezvous. "I am tired of the dice," he complained, "and sick of tennis, at which I know everybody's strength. Madame de Verneuil is at Fontainebleau; the Queen is unwell. Oh, Sully, I would the old days were back when we had Nèrac for our Paris, and knew the saddle better than the armchair."

"The King belongs to his people."

"The fowl in the pot?" he replied. "To be sure. But time enough to think of that to-morrow." And do what I would I could not turn him. In

the end, therefore, I took my leave of him as if for the night, and retired leaving him at play with the Duke of Epernon. But an hour later, towards eight o'clock, he made an excuse to withdraw to his closet, and met me outside the eastern gate of the Louvre. He was masked, and had with him only Coquet, the master of the household. I too had taken a mask and was esquired by Maignan, under whose orders were four Swiss—whom I had chosen because they spoke no French—and who had Andrew in charge. I bade Maignan follow the innkeeper's directions, and we proceeded in two parties through the streets in the direction of the Arsenal, until we reached the mouth of an obscure lane near the gardens of St. Pol, so narrow that the decrepit wooden houses shut out well-nigh all view of the sky. Here the prisoner halted and called upon me to fulfil the terms of my agreement. With misgiving I complied. I bade Maignan remain with the Swiss at a distance of fifty paces—directing him to come up only if I should whistle or give the alarm; then I myself, with the King and Andrew, proceeded onward in the deep shadow of the houses. I kept my hand on my pistol, which I had previously showed to the prisoner, intimating that on the first sign of treachery I should blow his brains out. However, in spite of this precaution, I felt uncomfortable to the last degree. I blamed myself for allowing the King to expose himself to this unnecessary dan-

ger; while the meanness of the quarter, the fetid air, the darkness of the night which was cold and stormy, and the uncertainty of the event lowered my spirits, and made every splash in the kennel, or stumble on the reeking slippery pavements—matters over which the King grew merry—seem no light troubles to me. We came at length to a house which, as far as we could judge in the darkness, seemed to be of rather greater pretensions than its fellows. Here, our guide stopped, and whispered to us to mount some steps to a raised wooden gallery, which intervened between the lane and the doorway. On this, beside the door, a couple of unglazed windows looked forth. The wooden lattice which covered one was sufficiently open to allow us to see a large bare crazy room, lighted by a couple of rushlights. Directing us to place ourselves close to this window, the innkeeper knocked at the door in a peculiar fashion, entered, and appeared at once in the lighted room, of which we had a view. Gazing through the window we were surprised to find that the only person within save Andrew, was a young woman, who, crouching over a smouldering fire, was crooning a lullaby while she attended to a large black pot.

"Good evening, mistress!" the innkeeper said, advancing to the fire. He masked well his nervousness: nevertheless, it was patent to us.

"Good evening, Master Andrew," she replied, looking up and nodding, but showing no sign of

surprise at his appearance. "Martin is away, but he may return at any moment."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"Is he still of the same mind?"

"Quite."

"Ah! That is so, is it. And what of Sully?" he continued, somewhat hoarsely. "Is he to die also?"

"They have decided that he must," the girl answered gloomily.

On that, it may be believed that I listened; while the King by a nudge in my side, seemed to rally me on the destiny so coolly arranged for me. "Martin," the girl continued, before the chill sensation had ceased to run down my back, "Martin says it is no good killing the other, unless he goes too—they have worked so long together. But it vexes me sadly, Master Andrew," she added, with a certain break in her voice. "Sadly it vexes me. I could not sleep last night for thinking of it, and the risk Martin runs. And I shall sleep less—when it is done."

"Pooh! pooh!" said that rascally innkeeper, and stirred the fire. "Think less about it. Things will grow worse and worse, if they are let live. The King has done harm enough already. And he grows old besides. And to put off a step of this kind is dangerous. If a word got about—'tis ruin."

"That is true!" the girl answered, gazing drearily at the pot. "And no doubt the sooner the King is put out of the way the better. I do not say a word for him. He must go. But 'tis Sully troubles me. He has done nought, and though he may become as bad as the others—he may not. It is that, and the risk Martin runs trouble me. 'Twould be death for him."

"Ay," said Andrew, cutting her short; "that's so." And they both looked at the fire.

At this I took the liberty of gently touching the King; but, by a motion of his finger, he enjoined silence. We stooped still farther forward so as to better command the room. The girl was rocking herself to and fro in evident anxiety. "If we killed the King," she said, "Martin declares we should be no better off, as long as Sully lives. Both or neither, he says. Both or neither. He grew mad about it. Both or neither! But I do not know. I cannot bear to think of it. It was a sad day when he brought the Duke here, Master Andrew, and one I fear we shall rue as long as we live!"

It was now the King's turn to be moved. He grasped my wrist so forcibly that I restrained a cry with difficulty. "The Duke!" he whispered harshly in my ear. "Then they are Epernon's tools! Where is your warranty now, Rosny?"

I confess that I trembled. I knew well that the King, particular in courtesies, never forgot to call

his servants by their titles save in two cases: when he indicated by the error, as once in Marshal Biron's affair, his intention to promote or degrade; or when he was moved to the depths of his nature and fell into an old habit. I did not dare to reply, but I listened greedily for more information.

"When is it to be done?" the innkeeper asked, sinking his voice, and glancing round as if he would call especial attention to this.

"That depends upon Master La Rivière," the girl answered. "To-morrow night, I understand, if the physician can have the stuff ready."

I met the King's eyes, shining in the faint light, which, issuing from the window, fell upon him. Of all things he hated treachery, and La Rivière was his first physician. At this very time, as I well knew, he was treating his Majesty for a slight derangement, which the King had brought upon himself by his imprudence. This doctor had formerly been in the employment of the Bouillon family, who had surrendered his services to the King. Neither I nor his Majesty had trusted the Duke of Bouillon for the last year past, so that we were not surprised by this hint that he also was privy to the design.

Despite our anxiety not to miss a word, an approaching step warned us to leave the window for a moment. More than once before we had done so to escape the notice of a wayfarer passing

up or down. But this time I had a difficulty in inducing the King to adopt the precaution. Yet it was well that I succeeded, for the person who came towards us did not pass, but, mounting the steps, almost within touch of me, entered the house.

"The plot thickens," the King muttered. "Who is this?"

At the moment he asked I was racking my brain to remember. I have a good eye and a trained memory for faces; and this was one I had seen several times. The features were so familiar that I suspected the man of being a courtier in disguise, for he was shabbily dressed; and I ran over the names of several persons whom I knew to be Epernon's friends or agents. But he was none of these, and, obeying the King's gesture, I bent myself anew to the task of listening.

The girl looked up at the man's entrance, but did not rise. "You are late, Martin," she said.

"A little," the new-comer answered. "How do you do, Master Andrew? What news of Aubergenville?" And then, not without a trace of affection in his tone, "What, still vexing, my girl?" he added, laying a hand on the girl's shoulder. "You have too soft a heart for this business. I always said so."

She sighed, but made no answer.

"You have made up your mind to it, I hear," said the innkeeper.

"That is it. Needs must when the devil drives!" the man replied jauntily. He had a bold, reckless, determined air; yet in his face I thought I saw still surviving some traces of a better spirit.

"The devil in this case was the Duke," quoth Andrew.

"Ay, curse him! I would I had cut the dog's liver out before he crossed my threshold," cried the man, with passion. "But there, 'tis done! It is too late to say that now. What has to be done, has to be done."

"How are you going about it? Poison, the mistress says. And it is safest."

"Yes, she will have it so; but, if I had my way," the man continued hardily, "I would out one of these nights and cut the dogs' throats without more."

"You could never escape, Martin!" the girl cried, clasping her hands and rising in excitement. "It would be hopeless. It would be throwing away your own life. And besides, you promised me."

"Well, have it so. It is to be done your way, so there is an end," the man answered wearily. "It is more expensive, that is all. Give me my supper. The devil take the King, and Sully too! He will soon have them!"

Master Andrew rose on this, and I took his movement towards the door for a signal to us to retire. He came out presently, after bidding the

two good night, and closed the door behind him. He found us standing in the street waiting for him, and forthwith he fell on his knees in the mud and looked up at me, the perspiration standing thick on his white face. "My lord," he cried hoarsely, "I have earned my pardon!"

"If you go on," I said encouragingly, "as you have begun, have no fear." And I whistled up the Swiss, and bade Maignan go in with them and arrest the man and woman with as little disturbance as possible. While this was being done we waited without, keeping a sharp eye upon the informer, whose terror, I noted with suspicion, seemed to be increasing rather than diminishing. He did not try to escape, however, and Maignan presently came to tell us that he had executed the arrest without difficulty or resistance.

The importance of arriving at the truth before Epernon and the greater conspirators took the alarm was so vividly present to the minds both of the King and myself, that we decided to examine the prisoners in the house, rather than hazard the delay which the removal to a fit place must occasion. Accordingly taking the precaution to post Coquet in the street outside, and to plant a burly Swiss in the doorway, the King and I entered. I removed my mask, as I did so, being aware of the necessity of gaining the prisoners' confidence, but I begged the King to retain his. As I had expected, the man immediately recognized

me, and fell on his knees. A nearer view confirmed the notion I had previously entertained that his features were familiar to me, but I could not remember his name. I thought this a good starting point for the examination; and bidding Maignan withdraw, I assumed an air of mildness, and asked the fellow his name.

"Martin only, please your lordship," he answered; adding "Once I sold you two dogs, sir, for the chase; and to your lady a lapdog called Ninette, no larger than her hand. 'Twas of three pounds weight and no more."

I remembered the knave then, as a well-known dog dealer, who had been much about the court in the reign of Henry the Third and later: and I saw at once how convenient a tool he might be made since he could be seen in converse with people of all ranks without arousing suspicion. The man's face as he spoke expressed so much fear and surprise that I determined to try what I had often found successful in the case of greater criminals; to squeeze him for a confession, while still excited by his arrest, and before he had had time to consider what his chances of support at the hands of his confederates might be. I charged him therefore to tell the whole truth as he hoped for the King's mercy. He heard me, gazing at me piteously; but his only answer, to my surprise, was that he had nothing to confess. Nothing! nothing, as he hoped for mercy.

"Come! come!" I replied. "This will avail you nothing. If you do not speak quickly, and to the point, we shall find means to compel you. Who counselled you to attempt his Majesty's life?"

He stared at me, at that, so stupidly, and cried out with so real an appearance of horror, "How? I attempt the King's life? God forbid!" that I doubted we had before us a more dangerous rascal than I had thought; and I hastened to bring him to the point.

"What then—" I cried, frowning—"of the stuff Master La Rivière is to give you? To take the King's life? To-morrow night? Oh, we know something I assure you. Bethink you quickly, and find your tongue if you would have an easy death."

I expected to see his self-control break down at this proof of our knowledge. But he only stared at me with the same look of bewilderment, and I was about to bid them bring in the informer that I might see the two front to front, when the female prisoner who had hitherto stood beside him, weeping in such distress and terror as were to be expected in a woman of that class, suddenly stopped her tears and lamentations. It occurred to me that she might make a better witness. I turned to her, but when I would have questioned her, she broke on the instant into hysterics, screaming and laughing in the wildest manner.

From that, I remember, I learned nothing, though it greatly annoyed me. But there was one present who did, and that was the King. He laid his hand on my shoulder, gripping it with a force, that I read as a command to be silent. "Where," he said to the man, "do you keep the King and Sully and The Duke, my friend?"

"The King and Sully—with his lordship's leave—" the man said quickly, but with a frightened glance at me—"are in the kennels at the back of the house; but it is not safe to go near them. The King is raving mad, and—and the other dog is sickening, I fear. The Duke we had to kill a month back. He brought the disease here, and I have had such losses through him as have nearly ruined me, please your lordship. And if the tale that we have got the madness among the dogs, goes about——"

"Get up! Get up, man!" cried the King. And tearing off his mask he stamped up and down the room, so torn by paroxysms of laughter that he choked himself whenever he attempted to speak. I too now saw the mistake, but I could not at first see it in the same light. Commanding my choler as well as I could, I ordered one of the Swiss to fetch in the innkeeper, but to admit no one else.

The knave fell on his knees as soon as he saw me, his cheeks shaking like a jelly. "Mercy! mercy!" was all he could say.

"You have dared to play with *me?*" I whispered. "With me? With me?"

"You bade me joke!" he sobbed. "You bade me joke!"

I was about to say that it would be his last joke in this world, for my anger was fully aroused, but the King intervened.

"Nay," he said, laying his hand on my shoulder, "it has been the most glorious jest. He has joked indeed. I would not have missed it for a kingdom! Not for a kingdom! I command you, Sully, to forgive him."

On which his Majesty strictly charged the three that they should not, on peril of their lives, tell the story; his regard for me, when he had laughed to satiety, proving strong enough to overcome his love of the diverting. Nor to the best of my belief did they do so; being so shrewdly scared when they recognized the King that I think they never afterwards so much as spoke of the affair to one another. My master further gave me his promise that he would not disclose the matter even to Madame de Verneuil, or the Queen; and upon these representations he induced me freely to forgive the innkeeper. I may seem to have dwelt longer than I should on the amusing details of this conspiracy. But alas! in twenty-one years of power, I investigated many, and this one only —and one other—can I regard with satisfaction. The rest were so many warnings and predictions

of the fate which, despite all my care and fidelity, was in store for the King, my master.

* * * * *

Such were the reasons, which would have led me had I followed the promptings of my own sagacity to oppose the return of the Jesuits. It remains for me to add that these arguments lost their weight when set in the balance against the safety of my beloved master. To this plea the King himself for once condescended, and found those who were most strenuous to dissuade him the least able to refute it; since the less a man loved the Jesuits, the more ready he was to allow that the King's life could not be safe while the edict against them remained in force. The support which I gave to the King on this occasion exposed me to the utmost odium of my co-religionists, and was in later times ill-requited by the Order. But an incident which occurred while the matter was still in debate, and which I now for the first time make public, proved the wisdom of my conduct.

Fontainebleau was at this time in the hands of the builders, and the King had gone to spend his Easter at Chantilly, whither Mademoiselle d'Entragues had also repaired. During his absence I was seated one morning in my library at the Arsenal, when I was informed that Father Cotton, he who at Nancy had presented the petition of the Jesuits, and who was now in Paris pursuing

that business under a safe conduct, craved leave to wait upon me. I was not surprised, for I had been before this of some service to him. The pages of the Court while loitering outside the Louvre, as their custom is, had insulted the father by shouting after him, "Old Wool! Old Cotton!" in imitation of the Paris street cry. For this the King at my instigation had caused them to be whipped. I supposed that the Jesuit desired to thank me for this support—given in truth out of regard to discipline rather than to him; and I bade them admit him.

His first words uttered before my secretaries retired, indicated that this was his errand; and for a few moments I listened to such statements, and myself made such answers as became our positions. Then, as he did not go, I conceived the notion that he had come with a further purpose; and his manner, which seemed strangely lacking in ease, considering that he was a man of skill and address, confirmed the notion. I waited therefore with patience, and presently he named his Majesty with some expressions of devotion to his person. "I trust," said he, "that the air of Fontainebleau agrees with him, M. de Rosny."

"You mean, good father, of Chantilly?" I answered. "He is there."

"Ay, to be sure!" he rejoined. "I had forgotten. He is, to be sure, at Chantilly."

He rose after that to depart, but was delayed

by the raptures into which he fell on the subject of the fire, which the weather being cold for the time of year, I had caused to be lit. "It burns so brightly," said he, "that it must be of boxwood, M. de Rosny."

"Of boxwood?" I exclaimed, astonished.

"Ay, is it not?" he asked, looking at me with much simplicity.

"No!" I made answer rather peevishly. "Who ever heard of people burning boxwood in Paris, father? In the south, perhaps."

He apologized for his ignorance on the ground of his southern birth, and took his departure, leaving me in doubt as to the real purport of his visit. I was, indeed, more troubled by the uncertainty I felt than another less conversant with the methods of the Jesuits might have been; for I knew that it was their habit to drop a word where they dared not speak plainly, and I felt myself put on my mettle to interpret the father's hint. My perplexities were increased by the belief that he would not have intervened in a matter of small moment; hence the conviction grew upon me that while I stood idle before the hearth, the greatest interests might be at stake.

"Michel," I said at last, addressing the doyen of my secretaries, who chanced to be a Provencal, "have you ever seen a boxwood fire?"

He replied respectfully, but with some show of surprise, that he had done so, but not often;

adding that that wood was so valuable to the turner that few people were extravagant enough to use it for fuel. I assented, and felt the more certain that the Jesuit's remark held a meaning. The only other clue I had consisted in the mistake he had made as to the King's residence; and this might have dropped from him in inadvertence. Yet I was inclined to think it intentional; and I construed it as implying that the matter concerned the King personally. Which the more alarmed me.

I passed the day in great perplexity; but towards evening, acting on a sudden thought, I sent La Trape, my valet, a trusty fellow, who had saved my life at Villefranche, to the Three Pigeons, a large inn in the suburbs of Paris, at which travellers from north to south, who do not wish to enter the city, are accustomed to change horses. Acquitting himself of the commission with his usual adroitness, he returned with the news that a traveller of rank had passed through three days before, having sent in advance to order relays there and at Essonnes. La Trape reported that the gentleman had remained in his coach, and that none of the servants of the inn had seen his face. "But he had companions?" I said. My mind had not failed to conceive a certain suspicion.

"Only one, your grace. The rest were servants."

"And that one?"

"A man in the yard fancied that he recognized M. de la Varenne."

"Ah!" I said. My agitation was indeed so great that, before giving reins to it, I bade La Trape withdraw. I could scarcely believe that, acquainted as the King was with the plots which the Catholics were daily aiming at his life; and possessing such powerful enemies among the great Protestants as Tremonelle and Bouillon—to say nothing of Mademoiselle d'Entragues' half-brother, the Count of Auvergne, who hated him—I say, I could hardly believe that with full knowledge of these facts his Majesty had been so fool-hardy as to travel without guards to Fontainebleau. And yet I now felt a certainty that this was the case. The presence of La Varenne, the confidant of his intrigues, while it informed me of the cause of the journey, convinced me that his Majesty had given way to the sole weakness of his nature, and was bent on one of those adventures of gallantry which had been more becoming in the Prince of Béarn than in the King of France. Nor was I at a loss to guess the object of his pursuit. It had been lately whispered in the Court that the King had fallen in love with his mistress's younger sister, Susette d'Entragues; whose home at Malesherbes lay but three leagues from Fontainebleau, on the edge of the forest. This fact placed the King's imprudence in a stronger light; for he had scarcely in France a more dangerous

enemy than her brother, Auvergne, nor had the immense sums which he had settled on the elder sister satisfied the avarice or conciliated the hostility of her father.

I saw that Father Cotton had known more than I had. But his motive in speaking I found less easy to divine. It might be a wish to baulk this new passion through my interference, while he exposed me to the risk of his Majesty's anger. Or it might be the single desire to avert danger from the King's person. At any rate, constant to my rule of preferring, come what might, my master's interest to his favour, I sent for Maignan, my equerry, and bade him have an equipage ready at dawn.

At that hour, next morning, attended only by La Trape, with a groom, a page, and four Swiss, I started, giving out that I was bound for Sully to inspect that demesne, which had formerly been the property of my family, and of which the refusal had just been offered to me. Under cover of this destination, I was enabled to reach La Ferté Alais unsuspected. There, pretending that the motion of the coach fatigued me, I mounted the led horse, without which I never travelled, and bidding La Trape accompany me, I gave orders to the others to follow at their leisure to Pithiviers, where I proposed to stay the night.

La Ferté Alais, on the borders of the forest, is some five leagues westward of Fontainebleau and

as far north of Malesherbes, with which it is connected by a high-road. Having disclosed my intentions to La Trape, I left this road and struck into a woodland path which promised to conduct us in the right direction. But the luxuriance of the undergrowth, and the huge chaos of grey rocks which cumber that part of the forest, made it difficult to keep for any time in a straight line. After being an hour in the saddle we concluded that we had lost our way, and were confirmed in this, on reaching a clearing. In place of the chateau we saw before us a small house, which La Trape presently recognized as an inn, situate about a league and a half on the Fontainebleau side of Malesherbes.

We had still ample time to reach the Chateau by nightfall, but before proceeding farther it was necessary that our horses should have rest. Dismounting I bade La Trape see the sorrel well baited. The inn was a poor place; but having no choice, I entered it and found myself in a large room better furnished with company than accommodation. Three men, who appeared to be of those reckless blades who are commonly to be found in the inns on the outskirts of Paris, and who come not unfrequently to their ends at Montfaucon, were tippling and playing cards at a table near the door. They looked up on my entrance, but refrained from saluting me, which, as I was plainly dressed, and much travel-stained, was ex-

cusable. By the fire, partaking of a coarse meal, sat a fourth man of so singular an appearance that I must needs describe him. He was of great height and extreme leanness, resembling a maypole rather than a man. His face matched his form, for it was long and meagre, and terminated in a small peaked beard, which like his hair and moustachios was as white as snow. With all this his eyes glowed with something of the fire of youth, and his brown complexion and sinewy hands seemed to indicate robust health. He wore garments which had once been fashionable, but now bore marks of much patching, and I remarked that the point of his sword, which, as he sat, trailed on the stones behind him, had worn its way through the scabbard. Notwithstanding these signs of poverty he saluted me with the ease of a gentleman, and bade me with some stiffness share his table and the fire. Accordingly I drew up, and called for a bottle of the best wine, being minded to divert myself with him.

I was little prepared, however, for the turn his conversation took, or the tirade into which he presently broke; the object of which proved to be no other than myself! I do not know that I have ever cut so whimsical a figure as while I sat and heard my name loaded with reproaches; but being certain that he did not know me I waited patiently, and soon learned both who he was, and the grievance which he was about to lay before

the King. His name was Boisrosé. He had been the leader in that gallant capture of Fécamp, which took place while I represented his Majesty in Normandy, and his grievance was, that in the face of many promises he had been deprived of the government of the place. "He leads the King by the ear!" he cried loudly, and in an accent which marked him for a Gascon. "That villain of a De Rosny! But I will shew him up! I will trounce him! If the King will not, I will!" And with that he drew the hilt of his long rapier to the front with a gesture so truculent that the three bullies who had stopped to laugh resumed their game in haste.

Notwithstanding his sentiments, I was pleased to meet with a man of so singular a temper, whom I also knew to be courageous: and I was willing to amuse myself further. "But," I said modestly, "I have had some affairs with M. de Rosny, and I have never found him cheat me."

"Do not deceive yourself!" he cried, slapping the table. "He is a rascal! There is no one he will not cheat!"

"Yet," I ventured to reply, "I have heard that in many respects he is not a bad minister."

"He is a villain!" he repeated so loudly as to drown what I would have added. "A villain, sir, a villain! Do not tell me otherwise! But rest assured! I will make the King see him in his true colours! Rest content, sir! I will trounce

him! He has to do with Armand de Boisrosé!"

Seeing that he was not open to argument—for being opposed he grew warm—I asked him by what channel he intended to approach the King, and learned that here he felt a difficulty, since he had neither a friend at Court, nor money to buy one. Certain that the narrative of our rencontre and its sequel would amuse his Majesty, who loved a jest, I advised Boisrosé to go boldly to the King, and speak to him; which, thanking me as profusely as he had before reproached me, he avowed he would do. With that I rose.

At the last moment, and as I was parting from him, it occurred to me to try upon him the shibboleth which in Father Cotton's mouth had so mystified me. "This fire burns brightly," I said, kicking the logs together with my riding-boot. "It must be of boxwood."

"Of what, sir?" he asked politely.

"Of boxwood! Why not?" I replied in a louder tone.

"My certes!" he answered, staring at me. "They do not burn boxwood in this country. Those are larch trimmings, as all the world knows, neither more nor less!"

While he wondered at my ignorance, I was pleased to discover his; and so far I had lost my pains. But it did not escape me that the three gamesters had ceased to play, and were lis-

tening to our conversation. Moreover as I moved to the door they followed me with their eyes: and when I turned after riding a hundred yards I found that they had come to the door and were gaping after us.

This did not hinder me remarking that a hound which had been lying before the fire had come forth with us, and was now running in front, now gambolling about the horses' legs. I supposed that when it had accompanied us a certain way it would return; but it persisted, and presently where the road forked I had occasion to notice its movements; for choosing one of the paths it stood in the mouth of it, wagging its tail and inviting us to take that road: and this it did so pertinaciously and cheerfully that though the directions we had received at the inn would have led us to prefer the other track, we followed the dog as the more trustworthy guide.

We had gone from this point about four hundred paces forward, when La Trape showed me that the path was growing narrow, and betrayed few signs of being used. It seemed certain—though the dog still ran confidently ahead—that we were again astray; and I was about to draw rein and return when I saw that the undergrowth on the right of the path had assumed the character of a thick hedge of box—a shrub common only in a few parts of the forest. Though less prone than most men to put faith in omens, I accepted this;

and, notwithstanding that it wanted but an hour of sunset, I rode on, remarking that with each turn in the woodland path, the scrub on my left also gave place more and more to the sturdy tree which had been in my mind all day. Finally, we found ourselves passing through an alley of box—which no long time before had been clipped and dressed. A final turn brought us into a *cul de sac;* and there we were, in a kind of small arbour carpeted with turf, and so perfectly hedged in as to afford no exit save by the entrance. Here the dog placidly stood and wagged its tail, looking up at us.

I must confess that this termination of the adventure seemed so surprising, and the evening light shining on the level walls of green about us was so full of a solemn quiet, that I was not surprised to hear La Trape mutter a prayer. For my part, assured that something more than chance had brought me hither, I dismounted and spoke encouragement to the hound. But it only leapt upon me. Then I walked round the tiny enclosure, and presently I discovered, close to the hedge, three small patches, where the grass was slightly beaten or trodden down. A second glance told me more; I saw that at these places the hedge about three feet from the ground was hacked and hollowed. I stooped, until my eyes were level with the hole thus made, and discovered that I was looking through a funnel skilfully cut in

the wall of box. At my end the opening was rather larger than a man's face; at the other end not as large as the palm of the hand. The funnel rose gradually, so that I took the farther extremity of it to be about seven feet from the ground, and here it disclosed a feather dangling on a spray. From the light falling strongly on this, I judged it to be not in the hedge, but a pace or two from it on the hither side of another fence of box. On examining the remaining loopholes, I discerned that they bore upon the same feather.

My own mind was at once made up, but I bade my valet go through the same investigation, and then asked him whether he had ever seen an ambush of this kind laid for game. He replied that the shot would pass over the tallest stag, or aught but a man on horseback; and fortified by this, I mounted without saying more, and we retraced our steps. The hound, which had doubtless the habit, as some dogs have, of accompanying the first person who held out the prospect of a walk, presently left us, and without further adventure we reached the Chateau a little after sunset.

I expected to be received by the King with some displeasure, but it chanced that a catarrh had kept him within doors all day; and unable to hunt or visit his new flame, he had been at leisure, in this palace without a court, to consider the imprudence he was committing. He received

me therefore with the laugh of a schoolboy detected in a petty fault, and as I hastened to relate to him some of the things which M. de Boisrosé had said of the Baron de Rosny, I soon had the gratification of perceiving that my presence was not taken amiss. His Majesty gave orders that bedding should be furnished for my pavilion, and that his household should wait on me, and himself sent me from his table a couple of chickens and a fine melon, bidding me to come to him when I had supped.

I did so, and found him alone in his closet awaiting me with impatience; he had already divined that I had not made this journey merely to reproach him. Before informing him, however, of my suspicions, I craved leave to ask him one or two questions, and in particular whether he had been in the habit of going to Malesherbes daily.

"Daily," he admitted with a grimace. "What more, Father Confessor?"

"By what road, sire?"

"I have hunted mornings, and visited Malesherbes at midday. I have returned as a rule by the bridle-path, which passes the Rock of the Serpents."

"Patience, sire, one moment," I said. "Does that path run anywhere through a plantation of box?"

"It does," he answered, without hesitation.

"About half a mile on this side of the rock, it skirts Queen Catherine's maze."

Thereon I told the King without reserve all that had happened. He listened with the air of seeming carelessness which he always assumed when plots against his life were under discussion; but at the end he embraced me again with tears in his eyes. "France is beholden to you!" he said. "I have never had, nor shall have, such another servant as you, Rosny! The three ruffians at the inn," he continued, "are, of course, the tools, and the hound has been in the habit of accompanying them to the spot. Yesterday, I remember, I walked by that place with the bridle on my arm."

"By a special providence, sire," I said gravely.

"It is true," he answered, crossing himself, a thing I had never yet known him do in private. "But, now, who is the craftsman who has contrived this pretty plot? Tell me that, Grand Master."

On this point, however, though I had my suspicions, I begged leave to be excused until I had slept upon it. "Heaven forbid," I said, "that I should expose any man to your Majesty's resentment without cause. The wrath of kings is the forerunner of death."

"I have not heard," the King answered dryly, "that the Duke of Bouillon has called in a leech yet."

Before retiring, I learned that his Majesty had with him a score of light horse, whom La Varenne had requisitioned from Melun; and that some of these had each day awaited him at Malesherbes and ridden home behind him. Further, that Henry had been in the habit of wearing, when riding back in the evening, a purple cloak over his hunting-suit, a fact well known, I felt sure, to the assassins, who, unseen and in perfect safety, could fire at the exact moment when the cloak obscured the feather, and could then make their escape, secured by the stout wall of box from immediate pursuit.

I slept ill, and was aroused early by La Varenne coming to my bedside, and bidding me hasten to the King. I did so, and found him already in his boots and walking on the terrace with Coquet, his Master of the Household, Vitry, La Varenne, and a gentleman unknown to me. On seeing me he dismissed them, and while I was still a great way off, called out, chiding me for my laziness: then taking me by the hand in the most obliging manner, he made me walk up and down with him, while he told me what further thoughts he had of this affair; and hiding nothing from me even as he bade me speak to him whatever I thought without reserve, he required to know whether I suspected that the Entragues family were cognizant of this.

"I cannot say, sire," I answered prudently.

"But you suspect?"

"In your Majesty's cause I suspect all," I replied.

He sighed, and seeing that my eyes wandered to the group of gentlemen who had betaken themselves to the terrace steps, and were thence watching us, he asked me if I would answer for them. "For Vitry, who sleeps at my feet when I lie alone? For Coquet?"

"For three of them, I will, sire," I answered firmly. "The fourth I do not know."

"He is Auvergne's half-brother."

"M. Louis d'Entragues?" I muttered. "Lately returned, I think, from service in Savoy? I do not know him, sire. To-morrow I may be able to answer for him."

"And to-day? What am I to do to-day?"

I begged him to act as he had done each day since his arrival at Fontainebleau, to hunt in the morning, to take his midday meal at Malesherbes, to talk to all as if he had no suspicion: only on his return to take any road save that which passed the Rock of the Serpents.

The King turning to rejoin the others, I found that their attention was no longer directed to us, but to a singular figure which had made its appearance on the skirts of the group, and had already thrown three out of the four courtiers into a fit of laughter. The fourth, M. d'Entragues, did not seem to be equally diverted with the stranger's

appearance; nor did I fail to notice, being at the moment quick to perceive the slightest point of his conduct, that while the others were nudging one another, his countenance, darkened by an Italian sun, gloomed on the new-comer with an aspect of menace. On his side M. de Boisrosé—for he it was, the grotesque fashion of his dress more conspicuous than ever—stood eyeing the group with a mixture of awkwardness and resentment; until made aware of his Majesty's approach and of my presence in intimate converse with the King he stepped joyfully forward, a look of relief displacing all others on his countenance. "Ha! well met!" quoth the King in my ear. "It is your friend of yesterday. Now we shall have sport. And 'twill cheer us. We need it." And he pinched my arm.

As the old soldier approached with many low bows, the King spoke to him graciously, and bade him say what he sought. It happened then as I had expected. Boisrosé, after telling the King his name, turned to me and humbly begged that I would explain his complaint; which I consented to do, and did as follows: "This, sire," I said gravely, "is an old and brave soldier; who formerly served your Majesty to good purpose in Normandy, but has been cheated out of the recompense which he there earned by the trickery and chicanery of one of your Majesty's counsellors, the Baron de Rosny."

I could not continue, for the courtiers, on hearing this from my mouth, and on discovering that the stranger's odd appearance was but a prelude to the real diversion, could not restrain their laughter. The King, concealing his own amusement, turned to them with an angry air and bade them be silent; and the Gascon, encouraged by this and by the bold manner in which I had stated his grievance, scowled at them famously. "He alleges, sire," I continued, with the same gravity, "that the Baron de Rosny, after promising him the government of Fécamp, bestowed it on another, being bribed to do so, and has been guilty of many base acts which make him unworthy of your Majesty's confidence. That, I think, is your complaint, M. de Boisrosé?" I concluded, turning to the soldier; whom my deep seriousness so misled that he took up the story, and pouring out his wrongs did not fail to threaten to trounce me, or to add with much fervour that I was a villain!

He might have said more, but the courtiers, perceiving that the King broke at last into a smile, lost all control over themselves, and giving vent to loud peals of laughter, clasped one another by the shoulders and reeled to and fro in an ecstasy of enjoyment. The King gave way also and laughed heartily, clapping me again and again on the back, so that in fine there were only two serious faces to be seen, that of the poor

Boisrosé, who took all for lunatics, and my own. For my part I began to think that perhaps the jest had been carried far enough.

My master presently saw this, and collecting himself, turned to the amazed Gascon. "Your complaint is one," he said, "which should not be lightly made. Do you know the Baron de Rosny?"

Boisrosé, more and more out of countenance, said he did not.

"Then," said the King, "I will give you an opportunity of becoming acquainted with him. I shall refer your complaint to him, and he will decide upon it. More!" he continued, raising his hand for silence as Boisrosé, starting forward, would have appealed to him, "I will introduce you to him now. This is the Baron de Rosny."

The old soldier glared at me for a moment with starting eye-balls, and a dreadful despair seemed to settle on his face. He threw himself on his knees before the King. "Then, sire," said he in a heartrending voice, "am I ruined? My six children must starve, and my young wife die by the roadside!"

"That," answered the King, gravely, "must be for the Baron de Rosny to decide. I leave you to your audience."

He made a sign to the others, and, followed by them, walked slowly along the terrace, the while Boisrosé, who had risen to his feet, stood looking

after him like one demented, muttering in a voice that went to my heart that it was a cruel jest, and that he had bled for the King, and the King made sport of him.

Presently I touched him on the arm. "Come, have you nothing to say to me, M. de Bois-rosé?" I asked quietly. "You are a brave soldier and have done France service: why then need you fear? The Baron de Rosny is one man, the King's minister is another. It is the latter who speaks to you now. The office of Lieutenant Governor of Angoulême is vacant. It is worth twelve thousand livres by the year. I appoint you to it."

He murmured with a white face that I mocked him and that he was going mad; so that it was long before I could persuade him that I was in earnest. When I at last succeeded, his gratitude knew no bounds, and he thanked me again and again with the tears running down his face. "What I have done for you," I said modestly, "is the reward of your bravery. I ask only that you will not another time think that they who rule kingdoms are as those gay popinjays yonder. Whom the King, believe me, holds at their due value."

In a transport of delight he reiterated his offers of service, and feeling sure that I had gained him completely I asked him on a sudden where he had seen Louis d'Entragues before. In two words the

truth came out. He had seen him once only, on the previous day at the forest inn; the courtier had halted at the door and spoken with the three bullies, whom I had remarked there. I was not surprised, nay I had expected this, D'Entragues' near kinship to the Count of Auvergne and the mingled feelings with which I knew that the family regarded Henry preparing me to imagine treachery. Moreover, the nature of the ambush was proof that its author resided in the neighbourhood and was intimately acquainted with the forest paths. I should have carried this information at once to my master; but I learned that he had already started, and thus baffled and believing that his affection for Mademoiselle d'Entragues, if not for her sister, would lead him to act with undue leniency, I conceived a plan of my own.

Two hours after noon, therefore, I set out, as if for a ride, attended by La Trape only; but at some distance from the palace we were joined by Boisrosé, whom I had bidden to be at that point well armed and mounted. Thus reinforced—for the Gascon was still strong, and in courage a very Crillon, I proceeded to Malesherbes by a circuitous route which brought me within sight of the gates about the middle of the afternoon. I then halted under cover of a little wood of chestnuts, and waited until I saw the King, attended by several ladies and gentlemen, and followed by eight troopers, issue from the chateau. His Majesty was

walking, his horse being led behind him; and seeing this I rode out and approached the party as if I had that moment arrived to meet the King.

It would very ill become me to make idle reflections on the hollowness of Court life: withal, seldom have I known it better exemplified than in the scene then displayed before me. The sun was low, but its warm beams falling aslant on the gay group at the gates and on the flowered terraces and grey walls behind them seemed to present a picture at once peaceful and joyous. Yet I knew that treachery and death were lurking in the midst—even as between the parterres and the walls lay the dark sluggish moat; and it was only by an effort that, as I rode up, I could make answer to the thousand obliging things with which I was greeted and of which not the least polite were said by M. d'Entragues and his son. I took pains to observe Mademoiselle Susette, a beautiful girl still in her teens, but noways comparable as it seemed to me, in expression and vivacity to her famous sister. She was walking beside the King, her hands full of flowers, and her face flushed with shy excitement. I came, with little thought, to the conclusion that she, at least, knew nothing of what was intended by her family; who, having made the one sister the means of gratifying their avarice, were now baiting the trap of their vengeance with the other. Having

obtained what they needed, they were ashamed of the means by which they had obtained it: and would fain avenge their honour, while holding to that they had got by the sale of it.

Henry parted from the maid at length, and mounted his horse amid a ripple of laughter and compliments, D'Entragues holding the stirrup, and his son the cloak. I observed that the latter, as I had expected, was prepared to accompany us, which rendered my plan more feasible. Our road lay for a league in the direction of the Rock of the Serpents, the track which passed the latter—and was a trifle shorter—presently diverging from it. For some distance we rode along in easy talk, but on approaching the point of separation, the King looked at me with a whimsical air, as though he would lay on me the burden of finding an excuse for avoiding the shorter way. I had foreseen this and looked round to ascertain the positions of our company. I found that La Varenne and D'Entragues were close behind us, while the troopers with La Trape and Boisrosé were a hundred paces farther to the rear, and Vitry and Coquet had dropped out of sight. This being so, I suddenly reined in my horse so as to back it into that of D'Entragues, and then wheeled round on the latter, taking care to be between him and the King. "M. Louis d'Entragues," I said, dropping the mask and addressing him in a low voice but with the scorn which I felt and which he deserved.

"Your plot is known! If you would save your life confess to his Majesty here and now all you know, and throw yourself on his mercy!"

I confess that I had failed to take into account the pitch to which his nerves would be strung at such a time, and had expected to produce a greater effect than followed my words. His hand went indeed to his breast, but it was hard to say which seemed the more astounded, La Varenne or he. And the manner in which he flung back my accusation, lacked neither vigour nor the semblance of innocence. While Henry stood puzzled, and not a little put out, La Varenne was appalled. I saw this, that I had gone too far, or not far enough, and at once calling up unto my face and form all the sternness in my power I bade the traitor remain where he was. Then turning to his Majesty I craved leave to speak to him apart.

He hesitated, looking from me to D'Entragues with an air of displeasure which embraced us both, but in the end without permitting M. Louis to speak he complied, and going aside with me bade me with coldness speak out. As soon as I had repeated to him Boisrosé's words, his face underwent a change—for he too had remarked the discomfiture which the latter's appearance had caused D'Entragues in the morning. "The villain!" he said. "I do not now think you precipitate! Arrest him, but do him no harm!"

"If he resist, sire?" I asked.

"He will not," the King answered. "And in no case harm him! You understand me?"

I bowed, having my own thoughts on the subject, and the King without looking again at D'Entragues rode quickly away. M. Louis tried to follow and cried after him, but I thrust my horse in the way, and bade him consider himself a prisoner. At the same time I requested La Varenne, with Vitry and Coquet, who had come up and were looking on like men thunderstruck, to take four of the guards and follow the King.

"Then, sir, what do you intend to do with me?" D'Entragues asked. The defiant air with which he looked from me to the men who remained barely disguised his apprehensions.

"That depends, M. Louis," I replied, recurring to my usual tone of politeness, "on your answers to three questions."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Ask them," he said.

"Do you deny that you have laid an ambush for the King in the road which passes the Rock of the Serpents?"

"Absolutely."

"Or that you were yesterday at an inn near here in converse with three men?"

"Absolutely."

"Do you deny that there is such an ambush laid?"

"At least I know naught of it!" he repeated

with scorn. "'Tis an old wife's story. I would stake my life on it."

"Enough," I answered slowly. "You have said you would stake your life on it. You shall. The evening grows cold, and, as you are my prisoner, I must have a care of you. Kindly put on this cloak, and precede me, M. d'Entragues. We return to Fontainebleau by the Rock of the Serpents."

His eyes met mine; he read my thoughts, and for a second held his breath. A cold shadow fell upon his sallow face, and then for an instant I thought that he would resist. But the stern countenances of La Trape and Boisrosé, who had ridden up to his rein and stood awaiting his answer with their swords drawn, determined him. With a forced and mirthless laugh he took the cloak. "It is new, I hope," he said, as he threw it over his shoulders.

It was not, and I apologized, adding, however, that no one but the King had worn it. On this he settled it about him; and having heard me strictly charge the two guards, who followed with their arquebuses ready, to fire on him if he tried to escape, he turned his horse's head into the path and rode slowly along it, while we, in double file, followed a few paces behind him.

The sun had set, and such light as remained fell cold between the trees. The green of the sward had that pale look it puts on with the last rays, or with the dawning. The crackling of a stick

under a horse's hoof, or the ring of a spur against a scabbard, were the only sounds which broke the stillness of the wood as we proceeded. We had gone some way when M. Louis halted, and, turning in his saddle, called to me. "M. de Rosny," he said—the light had so far failed that I could scarcely see his face, "I have a meeting with the Vicomte de Matigny on Saturday about a little matter of a lady's glove. Should anything prevent my appearance——"

"I will see that a proper explanation is given," I answered.

"Or, if M. d'Entragues will permit me," exclaimed the Gascon, who was riding by my side, "I, M. de Boisrosé of St. Palais, will appear in his place and make the Viscount de Caylus swallow the glove."

"Sir," said M. Louis, with politeness, and in a steady tone, "you are a gentleman. I am obliged to you."

He waved his hand to me with a gesture which I long remembered, and, giving his horse the rein, he went forward along the path at a brisk walk. We followed, and I had just remarked that a plant of box was beginning here and there to take the place of the usual undergrowth when a sheet of flame leapt out through the dusk to meet us, and our horses reared wildly. For an instant we were in confusion; then I saw that our leader, M. Louis, had fallen headlong from his saddle, and lay on

the sward without word or cry. My men would have sprung forward before the noise of the report had died away, and, having good horses, might possibly have overtaken one of the assassins; but I restrained them. Enough had been done. When La Trape dismounted and raised the fallen man the latter was dead, his breast riddled by a dozen slugs.

Such were the circumstances, now for the first time made public, which attended the discovery of this, the least known, yet one of the most dangerous of the many plots which were directed against the life of my master. The course which I adopted may be blamed by some, but it is enough for me that, after the lapse of years, it is approved by my conscience and by the course of events. For it was ever the misfortune of that great king to treat those with leniency whom no indulgence could win; and I bear with me to this day the bitter assurance that, had the fate which overtook Louis d'Entragues in the wood between Malesherbes and Fontainebleau embraced the whole of that family, the blow which, ten years later, went to the heart of France would not have been struck.

* * * * *

The slight indisposition from which the Queen suffered in the spring of 1602, and which was occasioned by a cold caught during her lying-in, by diverting the King's attention from state mat-

ters, had the effect of doubling the burden cast on me. Though the main threads of M. de Biron's conspiracy were in our hands as early as the month of November of the preceding year, and steps had been taken to sound the chief associates by summoning them to court, an interval necessarily followed during which we had all to fear; and this not only from the despair of the guilty, but from the timidity of the innocent, who in a court filled with cabals and rumours of intrigues might see no way to clear themselves. Even the shows and interludes which followed the Dauphin's birth, and made that Christmas remarkable, served only to amuse the idle; they could not disperse the cloud which hung over the Louvre nor divert those who on the one side or the other had aught to fear.

In connection with this period of suspense I recall an episode worthy, I think, by reason of its oddity, to be set down here; where it may serve for a preface to those more serious events attending the trial and execution of M. de Biron, which I shall have to relate.

I had occasion, about the end of the month of January, to see M. du Hallot. The weather was cold, and partly for that reason, partly out of a desire to keep my visit, which had to do with the Biron disclosures, from the general eye, I chose to go on foot. For the same reason I took with me only two servants and a confidential page, the son

of my friend Arnaud. M. du Hallot, who lived at this time in a house in the Faubourg St. Germain, not far from the College of France, detained me long, and when I rose to leave insisted that I should take his coach, as snow had begun to fall, and lay an inch deep in the streets. At first I was unwilling to do this, but reflecting that such small services are highly valued by those who render them, and attach men more surely than the greatest bribes, I yielded, and, taking my place with some becoming expressions, bade young Arnaud find his way home on foot.

The coach had nearly reached the south end of the Pont au Change, when a number of youths ran past me, pelting one another with snowballs, and shouting so lustily that I was at a loss which to admire more, the silence of their feet or the loudness of their voices. Aware that lads of that age are no respecters of persons, I was not surprised to see two or three of them rush on to the bridge before us, and even continue their Parthian warfare under the feet of the horses. The result, however, was that the latter took fright at that part of the bridge where the houses encroach most on the roadway; and but for the care of the running footman, who hastened to their heads, might have done some harm either to the coach or the passers-by.

As it was, we were brought to a stop while one of the wheels was extricated from the kennel, in

which it had become wedged. Smiling to think what the King—who, strangely warned by Providence, was throughout his life timid in a coach—would have said to this, I went to open the curtains, and had effected this to some extent, when one of a crowd of idlers who stood on the raised pavement deliberately lifted up his arm and flung a snowball at me.

The missile flew wide of its mark by an inch or two only. That I was amazed at such audacity goes without saying; but doubting of what it might be the preclude—for the breakdown of the coach in that narrow place, the haunt of rufflers and vagrants of every kind, might be part of a concerted plan—I fell back into my place. The coach, as it happened, moved on at that moment with a jerk; and before I had digested the matter, or had time to mark the demeanour of the crowd, we were clear of the bridge, and rolling under the Châtelet.

A smaller man might have stooped to punish, and to cook a sprat have passed all Paris through the net. But remembering the days when I myself attended the College of Burgundy, I set the freak to the credit of some young student, and, shrugging my shoulders, dismissed it from my mind. An instant later, however, observing that the fragments of the snowball were melting on the seat and wetting the leather, I raised my hand to brush them away. In doing so I discovered, to

my surprise, a piece of paper lying among the *débris*.

"Ho, ho!" said I to myself. "A strange snowball this! I have heard that the apprentices put stones in theirs. But paper! Let me see what this means."

The morsel, though moistened by the snow, remained intact. Unfolding it with care—for already I began to discern that here was something out of the common—I found written on the inner side, in a clerkly hand, the words, "*Beware of Nicholas!*"

It will be remembered that Simon Nicholas was at this time secretary to the King, and so high in his favour as to be admitted to the knowledge of all but his most private affairs. Gay, and of a jovial wit, he was able to commend himself to Henry by amusing him; while his years, for he was over sixty, seemed warranty for his discretion, and at the same time gave younger sinners a feeling of worth, since they might repent and he had not done so. Often in contact with him, I had always found him equal to his duties, and though too fond of the table, and of the good things of this life, neither given to blabbing nor boasting. In a word, one for whom I had more liking than respect.

A man in his position possesses opportunities for evil so stupendous that as I read the warning I sat aghast. His office gave him at all times that

ready access to the King's person which is the aim of conspirators against the lives of sovereigns; and short of the supreme treachery he was master of secrets which Biron's associates would give much to gain. When I add that I knew Nicholas to be a man of extravagant habits and careless life, and one who, if rumour did not wrong him, had lost much in that rearrangement of the finances which I had lately effected, it will be seen that those words, "Beware of Nicholas," were calculated to provoke me to the most profound thought.

Of the person who had conveyed the missive to my hands I had unfortunately seen nothing; though I believed him to be a man, and young. But the circumstances, which seemed to indicate the need of secrecy, gave me a hint as to my conduct. Accordingly, I smoothed my brow, and on the coach stopping at the Arsenal, I descended with my usual face of preoccupation.

At the foot of the staircase my *maître-d'hotel* met me.

"M. Nicholas, the King's secretary, is here," he said. "He has been waiting your return an hour and more, my lord."

"Lay another cover," I answered, repressing the surprise I could not but feel at a visit so strangely *à propos*. "Doubtless he has come to dine with me."

Staying only to remove my cloak, I went up-

stairs with an air as easy as possible, and, making my visitor some apologies for the inconvenience I had caused him, I insisted he should sit down with me. This he was not loth to do; though, as presently appeared, his errand was only to submit to me a paper connected with the new tax of a penny in the shilling, which it was his duty to lay before me.

I scolded him for the long period which had elapsed since his last visit, and succeeded so well in setting him at his ease that he presently began to rally me on my lack of appetite; for I could touch nothing but a little game and a glass of water. Excusing myself as well as I could, I encouraged him to continue the attack; and certainly, if appetite waits on a good conscience, I had abundant evidence in his behalf. He grew merry and talkative, and, telling me some free tales, bore himself so naturally that I had begun to deem my suspicions baseless, when a chance word gave me new grounds for entertaining them.

I was on the subject of my morning's employment. Knowing how easily confidence begets confidence, and that in his position the matter could not be long kept from him, I told him as a secret where I had been.

"I do not wish all the world to know, my friend," I said. "But you are a discreet man, and it will go no farther. I am just from Du Hallot's."

He dropped his napkin and stooped to pick it up

with a gesture so hasty that it caught my attention and led me to watch him. More, although my words seemed to call for an answer, he did not speak until he had taken a deep draught of wine; and then he said only, "Indeed!" in a tone of such indifference as might at another time have deceived me, but now was patently assumed.

"Yes," I replied, affecting to be engaged with my plate: we were eating nuts. "Doubtless you will be able to guess on what subject."

"I?" he said, as quick to answer as he had been slow. "No, I think not."

"La Fin," I said. "And his disclosures respecting M. de Biron's friends."

"Ah!" he replied, shrugging his shoulders. He had contrived to regain his composure, but I noticed that his hand shook, and I saw that he was quite unable to chew the nut he had just put into his mouth. "They tell me he accuses everybody," he continued, his eyes on his plate. "Even the King is scarcely safe from him. But I have heard no particulars."

"They will be known by-and-by," I answered prudently. And after that I did not think it wise to continue, lest I should give more than I got. But as soon as he had finished, and we had washed our hands, I led him to the closet looking on the river, where I was in the habit of working with my secretaries. I sent them away and sat down with him to his paper; but in the position

in which I found myself, between suspicion and perplexity, I gathered little or nothing from it; and had I found another doing the King's service as negligently I had sent him about his business. Nevertheless, I made some show of attention, and had reached the schedule when something in the fairly written summary, which closed the account, caught my eye. I bent more closely to it, and presently making an occasion to carry the parchment into the next room, compared it with the hand-writing on the scrap of paper I had found in the snowball. A brief scrutiny proved that they were the work of the same person!

I went back to M. Nicholas, and after attesting the accounts, and making one or two notes, remarked in a careless way on the clearness of the hand. "I am badly in need of a fourth secretary," I added. "Your scribe might do for me."

It did not escape me that once again M. Nicholas looked uncomfortable. His red face took a deeper tinge and his hand went nervously to his pointed grey beard. "I do not think he would do for you," he muttered.

"What is his name?" I asked, purposely bending over the papers and avoiding his eye.

"I have dismissed him," he rejoined curtly. "I do not know where he could now be found."

"That is a pity. He writes well," I answered, as if it were nothing but a whim that led me to

pursue the subject. "And good clerks are scarce. What was his name?"

"Felix," he said—reluctantly.

I had now all that I wanted. Accordingly I spoke of another matter, and shortly afterwards Nicholas withdrew. He left me in much suspicion; so that for nearly half an hour I walked up and down the room, unable to decide whether I should treat the warning of the snowball with contempt, as the work of a discharged servant; or on that very account attach the more credit to it. By-and-by I remembered that the last sheet of the roll I had audited bore date the previous day; whence it was clear that Felix had been dismissed within the last twenty-four hours, and perhaps after the delivery of his note to me. Such a coincidence, which seemed no less pertinent than strange, opened a wide field for conjecture; and the possibility that Nicholas had called on me to sound me and learn what I knew occurring to my mind, brought me to a final determination to seek out this Felix, and without the delay of an hour sift the matter to the bottom.

Doubtless I shall seem to some to have acted precipitately, and built much on small foundations. I answer that I had the life of the King my master to guard, and in that cause dared neglect no precaution, however trivial, nor any indication, however remote. Would that all my care and vigilance had longer sufficed to preserve for France

the life of that great man! But God willed otherwise.

I sent word at once to La Font, my *valet-de-chambre*, the same who persuaded me to my first marriage, to come to me; and directing him to make secret inquiry where Felix, a clerk in the Chamber of Accounts, lodged, bade him report to me on my return from the Great Hall, where, it will be remembered, it was my custom to give audience after dinner to all who had business with me. As it happened, I was detained that day, and found him awaiting me. A man of few words, as soon as the door was shut, "At the 'Three Half Moons,'" he said, "in the Faubourg St. Honoré, my lord."

"That is near the Louvre," I answered. "Get me my cloak, and your own also; and bring your pistols. I am for a walk, and you will accompany me."

He was a good man, La Font, and devoted to my interests. "It will be night in half an hour," he answered respectfully. "You will take some of the Swiss?"

"In one word, no!" I rejoined. "We will go out by the stable entrance, and until we return, I will bid Maignan keep the door, and admit no one."

The crowd of those who daily left the Arsenal at nightfall happened to be augmented on this occasion by a troop of my clients from Mantes; tenants on the lands of Rosny, who had lingered after

the hour of audience to see the courts and garden. By mingling with these we passed out unobserved; nor, once in the streets, where a thaw had set in, that filled the kennel with water, was La Font long in bringing me to the house I sought. It stood on the outskirts of the St. Honoré Faubourg, in a quarter sufficiently respectable, and a street marked neither by squalor nor ostentation —from one or other of which all desperate enterprises take their rise. The house, which was high and narrow, presented only two windows to the street, but the staircase was clean, and it was impossible to cross the threshold without feeling a prepossession in Felix's favour. Already I began to think that I had come on a fool's errand.

"Which floor?" I asked La Font.

"The highest," he answered.

I went up softly and he followed me. Under the tiles I found a door, and heard some one moving beyond it. Bidding La Font remain on guard, and come to my aid only if I called him, I knocked boldly. A gentle voice bade me enter, and I did so.

There was only one person in the room, a young woman with fair waving hair, a pale freckled face, and blue eyes; who, seeing a cloaked stranger instead of the neighbour she anticipated, stared at me in the utmost wonder and in some alarm. The room, though poorly furnished, was neat and clean; which, taken with the woman's complexion, left me in no doubt as to her province. On the

floor near the fire stood a cradle; and in the window a cage with a singing bird completed the homely aspect of this interior, which was such, indeed, as I would fain multiply by thousands in every town of France.

A lamp, which the woman was in the act of lighting, enabled me to see these details, and also discovered me to her. I asked politely if I spoke to Madame Felix, the wife of M. Felix, of the Chamber of Accounts.

"I am Madame Felix," she answered, advancing slowly towards me. "My husband is late. Do you come from him? It is not—bad news, Monsieur?"

The tone of anxiety in which she uttered the last question, and the quickness with which she raised her lamp to scan my face, went to a heart already softened by the sight of this young mother in her home. I hastened to answer that I had no bad news, and wished to see her husband on business connected with his employment.

"He is very late," she said, a shade of perplexity crossing her face. "I have never known him so late before. Monsieur is unfortunate."

I replied that with her leave I would wait; on which she very readily placed a stool for me, and sat down by the cradle. I remarked that perhaps M. Nicholas had detained her husband: she answered that it might be so, but that she had never known it happen before.

"M. Felix has evening employment?" I asked, after a moment's reflection.

She looked at me in some wonder. "No," she said. "He spends his evenings with me, Monsieur. It is not much, for he is at work all day."

I bowed, and was preparing another question, when the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs reached my ears, and led me to pause. Madame heard the noise at the same moment and rose to her feet. "It is my husband," she said, looking towards the door with such a light in her eyes as betrayed the sweetheart lingering in the wife. "I was afraid—I do not know what I feared," she muttered to herself.

Proposing to have the advantage of seeing Felix before he saw me, I pushed back my stool into the shadow, contriving to do this so discreetly that the young woman noticed nothing. A moment later it appeared that I might have spared my pains; for at sight of her husband, and particularly of the lack-lustre eye and drooping head with which he entered, she sprang forward with a cry of dismay, and, forgetting my presence, appealed to him to know what was the matter.

He let himself fall on a stool, the first he reached, and, leaning his elbows on the table in an attitude of dejection, he covered his face with his hands. "What is it?" he said in a hollow tone.

"We are ruined, Margot. That is what it is. I have no more work. I am dismissed."

"Dismissed?" she ejaculated.

He nodded. "Nicholas discharged me this morning," he said, almost in a whisper. He dared not speak louder, for he could not command his voice.

"Why?" she asked, as she leant over him, her hands busy about him. "What had you done?"

"Nothing!" he answered with bitterness. "He has missed a place he thought to get; and I must suffer for it."

"But did he say nothing? Did he give no reason?"

"Ay," he answered. "He said clerks were plentiful, and the King or I must starve."

Hitherto I had witnessed the scene in silence, a prey to emotions so various I will not attempt to describe them. But hearing the King's name thus prostituted I started forward with a violence which made my presence known. Felix, confounded by the sight of a stranger at his elbow, rose from his seat, and retreating before me with alarm painted on his countenance, he asked with a faltering tongue who I was.

I replied as gently as possible that I was a friend, anxious to assist him. Notwithstanding that, seeing that I kept my cloak about my face—for I was not willing to be recognized—he continued to look at me with distrust.

"What is your will?" he said, raising the lamp much as his wife had done, to see me the better.

"The answers to two or three questions," I replied. "Answer them truly, and I promise you your troubles are at an end." So saying, I drew from my pouch the scrap of paper which had come to me so strangely. "When did you write this, my friend?" I continued, placing it before him.

He drew a deep breath at sight of it, and a look of comprehension crossed his face. For a moment he hesitated. Then in a hurried manner he said that he had never seen the paper.

"Come," I rejoined sternly, "look at it again. Let there be no mistake. When did you write that, and why?"

Still he shook his head; and, though I pressed him, he continued so stubborn in his denial that, but for the look I had seen on his face when I produced the paper, and the strange coincidence of his dismissal, I might have believed him. As it was, I saw nothing for it but to have him arrested and brought to my house, where I did not doubt he would tell the truth; and I was about to retire to give the order, when something in a sidelong glance which he cast at his wife caught my eye, and furnished me with a new idea. Acting on it, I affected to be satisfied. I apologized for my intrusion on the ground of mistake; and, withdrawing to the door, I asked him at the last moment to light me downstairs.

Complying with a shaking hand, he went out before me, and had nearly reached the foot of the staircase when I touched him on the shoulder.

"Now," I said, fixing him with my eyes, "your wife is no longer listening, and you can tell me the truth. Who employed you to write those words?"

Trembling so violently that he had to lean on the balustrade for support, he told me.

"Madame Nicholas," he whispered.

"What?" I cried, recoiling. I had no doubt he was telling me the truth. "The secretary's wife, do you mean? Be careful, man."

He nodded.

"When?" I asked suspiciously.

"Yesterday," he answered. "She is an old cat!" he continued, with a grimace. "I hate her! But my wife is jealous, and would think all things."

"And did you throw it into a coach," I said, "on the Pont du Change to-day?"

"God forbid!" he replied, shrinking into himself again. "I wrote it for her, and she took it away. She said it was a jest that she was playing. That is all I know."

I saw that he spoke the truth, and after a few more words I dismissed him, bidding him keep silence, and remain at home in case I needed him. At the last, he plucked up spirit to ask who I was; but preferring to keep that discovery for a day to come, when I might appear as the bene-

factor of this little family, I told him only that I was one of the King's servants, and so left him.

It will be believed that I found the information I had received little to my mind. The longer I dwelt on it, the more serious seemed the matter. While I could not imagine circumstances in which a woman would be likely to inform against her husband without cause, I could recall more than one conspiracy which had been frustrated by informers of that class—sometimes out of regard for the persons against whom they informed. Viewed in this light, the warning seemed to my mind sufficiently alarming; but when I came also to consider the secrecy with which Madame Nicholas had both prepared it and conveyed it to me, the aspect of the case grew yet more formidable. In the result, I had not passed through two streets before my mind was made up to lay the case before the King, and be guided by the sagacity which was never wanting to my gracious master.

An unexpected meeting which awaited me on my return to the Arsenal confirmed me in this resolution and enabled me to carry it into effect. We entered without difficulty, and duly found Maignan on guard at the door of my apartments. But a glance at his face sufficed to show that something was wrong; nor did it need the look of penitence which he assumed on seeing us—a look so piteous that at another time it must have diverted

me—to convince me that he had infringed my orders.

"How now, sirrah?" I said, without waiting for him to speak. "What have you been doing?"

"They would take no refusal, my lord," he answered plaintively, waving his hand towards the door.

"What!" I cried sternly; for this was an instance of such direct disobedience as I could scarce understand. "Did I not give you the strictest orders to deny me to everybody?"

"They would take no refusal, my lord," he answered penitently, edging away from me as he spoke.

"Who are they?" I asked, leaving the question of his punishment for another season. "Speak, rascal, though it shall not save you."

"There are M. le Marquis de la Varenne, and M. de Vitry," he said slowly, "and M. de Vic, and M. Erard the engineer, and M. de Fontange, and——"

"Pardieu!" I cried, cutting him short in a rage; for he was going on counting on his fingers in a manner the most provoking. "Have you let in all Paris, dolt? Grace! that I should be served by a fool! Open the door, and let me see them."

With that I was about to enter; when the door, which I had not perceived to be ajar, was thrown widely open, and a laughing face thrust out. It was the King's.

"Ha, ha! Grandmaster!" he cried, diverted by

the success of his jest and the change which doubtless came over my countenance. "Never was such hospitality, I'll be sworn! But come, pardon this varlet. And now embrace me, and tell me where you have been playing truant."

Saying these words with the charm which never failed him, and in his time won more foes than his sword ever conquered, the King drew me into my room, where I found De Vic, Vitry, Roquelaure, and the rest. They all laughed heartily at my surprise; nor was Maignan, who was the author, it will be remembered, of that whimsical procession to Rosny after the battle of Ivry, which I have elsewhere described, far behind them; the rascal knowing well that the King's presence covered all, and that in my gratification at the honour paid me I should be certain to overlook his impertinence.

Perceiving that this impromptu visit had no other object than to divert Henry—though he was kind enough to say that he felt uneasy when he did not see me often—I begged to know if he would honour me by staying to sup; but this he would not do, though he consented to drink a cup of my Arbois wine, and praised it highly. By-and-by I thought I saw that he was willing to be alone with me; and as I had reason to desire this myself, I made an opportunity. Sending for Arnaud and some of my gentlemen, I committed my other guests to their care, and led the King

into my closet, where, after requesting his leave to speak on business, I proceeded to unfold to him the adventure of the snowball, with all the particulars which I have set down.

He listened attentively, drumming on the table with his fingers; nor did he move or speak when I had done, but still continued in the same attitude of thought. At last: "Grandmaster," he said, touching with his hand the mark of the wound on his lip, "how long is it since Chastel's attempt—when I got this?"

"Seven years last Christmas, sire," I answered, after a moment's thought.

"And Barrière's?"

"That was the year before. Avenius' plot was that year too."

"And the Italian's from Milan, of whom the Capuchin Honorio warned us?"

"That was two years ago, sire."

"And how many more attempts have there been against my person?" he continued, in a tone of extreme sadness. "Rosny, my friend, they must succeed at last. No man can fight against his fate. The end is sure, notwithstanding your fidelity and vigilance, and the love you bear me, for which I love you, too. But Nicholas? Nicholas? And yet he has been careless and distraught of late. I have noticed it; and a month back I refused to give him an appointment, of which he wished to have the sale."

I did not dare to speak, and for a time Henry too remained silent. At length he rose with an air of resolution.

"We will clear up this matter within an hour!" he said. "I will send my people back to the Louvre, and do you, Grandmaster, order half a dozen Swiss to be ready to conduct us to this woman's house. When we have heard her we shall know what to do."

I tried my utmost to dissuade him, pleading that his presence could not be necessary, and might prove a hindrance; besides exposing his person to a certain amount of risk. But he would not listen. When I saw, therefore, that his mind was made up, and that as his spirits rose he was inclined to welcome this expedition as a relief from the *ennui* which at times troubled him, I reluctantly withdrew my opposition and gave the necessary orders. The King dismissed his suite with a few words, and in a short space we were on our way, under cover of darkness, to the secretary's house.

He lived at this time in a court off the Rue St. Jacques, not far from the church of that name; and the house being remote from the eyes and observation of the street, seemed not unfit for secret and desperate uses. Although we noted lights shining behind several of the barred windows, the wintry night, the darkness of the court, and perhaps the errand on which we came, im-

parted so gloomy an aspect to the place that the King hitched forward his sword, and I begged him to permit the Swiss to go on with us. This, however, he would not allow, and they were left at the entrance to the court with orders to follow at a given signal.

On the steps the King, who, to disguise himself the better, had borrowed one of my cloaks, stumbled and almost fell. This threw him into a fit of laughter; for no sooner was he engaged in an adventure which promised peril, than his spirits rose to such a degree as to make him the most charming companion in danger man ever had. He was still shaking, and pulling me to and fro in one of those boyish frolics which at times swayed him, when a loud outcry inside the house startled us into sobriety, and reminded us of the business which brought us thither.

Wondering what it might mean, I was for rapping on the door with my hilt. But the King put me aside, and, by a happy instinct, tried the latch. The door yielded to his hand, and gave us admittance.

We found ourselves in a gloomy hall, ill-lit, and hung with patched arras. In one corner stood a group of servants. Of these some looked scared and some amused, but all were so much taken up with the movements of a harsh-faced woman, who was pacing the opposite side of the hall, that they did not heed our entrance. A glance showed me

that the woman was Madame Nicholas; but I was still at a loss to guess what she was doing or what was happening in the house.

I stood a moment, and then finding that in her excitement she took no notice of us, I beckoned to one of the servants, and bade him tell his mistress that a gentleman would speak with her. The man went with the message; but she sent him off with a flea in his ear, and screamed at him so violently that for a moment I thought she was mad. Then it appeared that the object of her attention was a door at that side of the hall; for, stopping suddenly in her walk, she went up to it, and struck on it passionately and repeatedly with her hands.

"Come out!" she cried. "Come out, you villain! Your friends shall not save you!"

Restraining the King, I went forward myself, and, saluting her, begged a word with her apart, thinking that she would recognize me.

Her answer showed that she did not. "No!" she cried, waving me off, in the utmost excitement. "No; you will not get me away! You will not! I know your tricks. You are as bad one as the other, and shield one another come what will!" Then turning again to the door, she continued, "Come out! Do you hear! Come out! I will have no more of your intrigues and your Hallots!"

I pricked up my ears at the name. "But, Madame," I said, "one moment."

"Begone!" she retorted, turning on me so wrathfully that I fairly recoiled before her. "I shall stay here till I drop; but I will have him out and expose him. There shall be an end of his precious plots and his Hallots if I have to go to the King!"

Words so curiously *à propos* could not but recall to my mind the confusion into which the mention of Du Hallot had thrown the secretary earlier in the day. And since they seemed also to be consistent with the warning conveyed to me, they should have corroborated my suspicions. But a sense of something unreal and fantastic, with which I could not grapple, continued to puzzle me in the presence of this angry woman; and it was with no great assurance that I said, "Do I understand then, madame, that M. du Hallot is in that room?"

"Monsieur du Hallot?" she replied, in a tone that was almost a scream. "No: but Madame du Hallot is, and he would be if he had taken the hint I sent him! He would be! But I will have no more secrecy, and no more plots. I have suffered enough, and now Madame shall suffer if she has not forgotten how to blush. Are you coming out there?" she continued, once more applying herself to the door, her face inflamed with passion. "I shall stay! Oh, I shall stay, I assure you, until you do come. Until morning if necessary!"

"But, Madame," I said, beginning to see daylight, and finding words with difficulty—for al-

ready I heard in fancy the King's laughter, and conjured up the quips and cranks with which he would pursue me—"your warning did not perhaps reach M. du Hallot?"

"It reached his coach, at any rate," the scold retorted. "But another time I will have no half measures. As for that," she continued, turning on me suddenly with her arms akimbo, and the fiercest of airs, "I would like to know what business it is of yours, Monsieur, whether it reached him or not! I know you,—you are in league with my husband! You are here to shelter him, and this Madame du Hallot who is within here! And with whom he has been carrying on these three months! But——"

At that moment the door at last opened; and M. Nicholas, wearing an aspect so meek and crestfallen that I hardly knew him, came out. He was followed by a young woman plainly dressed, and looking almost as much frightened as himself; in whom I had no difficulty in recognizing Felix's wife.

"Why!" Madame Nicholas cried, her face falling. "This is not—who is this? Who—" with increased vehemence—"is this baggage, I would like to know? This shameless creature, that——"

"My dear," the secretary protested, spreading out his hands—fortunately he had eyes only for his wife and did not see us—"this is one of your ridiculous mistakes! It is, I assure you. This is the wife of a clerk whom I dismissed to-day, and

she has been with me begging me to reinstate her husband. That is all. That is all, my dear, in truth it is. You have made this dreadful outcry for nothing. I assure you——"

I heard no more, for, taking advantage of the obscurity of the hall, and the preoccupation of the couple, I made for the door, and passing out into the darkness, found myself in the embrace of the King; who, seizing me about the neck, laughed on my shoulder until he cried, continually adjuring me to laugh also, and ejaculating between the paroxysms, "Poor du Hallot! Poor du Hallot!" With many things of the same nature, which any one acquainted with court life may supply for himself.

I confess I did not on my part find it so easy to laugh: partly because I am not of so gay a disposition as that great prince, and partly because I cannot see the ludicrous side of events in which I myself take part. But on the King assuring me that he would not betray the secret even to La Varenne, I took comfort, and gradually reconciled myself to an episode which, unlike the more serious events it now becomes my duty to relate, had only one result, and that unimportant. I mean the introduction to my service of the clerk Felix; who, proving worthy of confidence, remained with me after the lamentable death of the King my master, and is to-day one of those to whom I entrust the preparation of these Memoirs.

PART III

KING TERROR

A DAUGHTER OF THE GIRONDE

In a room on the second floor of a house in the Rue Favart in Paris—a large room scantily and untidily furnished—a man sat reading by the light of an oil lamp. The hour was late, the night a July night in the year 1794—year two of the Republic. The house already slumbered round him; the sounds of Paris rose to his ears softened by night and distance. Intent on his work, he looked up from time to time to make a note; or, drawing the lamp a little nearer he trimmed its wick and set it back. When this happened, the light falling strongly on his face, and bringing into relief its harsh lines and rugged features, showed him to be a man past middle life, grey-haired, severe, almost forbidding of aspect.

Peaceful as his occupation seemed, there was something in the air of the room which suggested change, even danger. The floor was littered with packing cases and with books piled together at random. On the low bedstead lay a travelling cloak; on the table, by the reader's hand, lay a pistol and beside it one of the huge sabres which were then in fashion. Nor were these signs without meaning. The man reading on, wrapt and unconscious, in his upper room, merely followed his

bent. He read and reasoned, though in the great city round him the terror of the Revolution was at its height; though the rattle of the drum had scarcely ceased with nightfall, and the last tumbril was even now being wheeled back into its shed.

For men grow strangely callous. The danger which impends daily and every day ceases to be feared. Achille Mirande had seen the chiefs of his party fall round him. He had seen Pétion and Barbaroux, Louvet and Vergniaud die—the Girondins who had dreamed with him of a republic of property, free and yet law-abiding. Nor had his experiences stopped there. He had seen his foes perish also, the Hébertists first and later the Dantonists. But for himself—death seemed to have passed him by. Danger had become second nature; the very rumbling of the tumbrils passing his house on the way to the guillotine had ceased to be anything but annoying; until to-day, to avoid the interruption, he had left his house in the Rue St. Honoré and established himself in this empty flat in the little Rue Favart.

By-and-by he laid down the book he was reading and fell into deep meditation. As he sat thus, alone and silent in the silent room, a sound, which a keener ear would have noticed before, attracted his attention. Startled in a degree by it, he roused himself; he looked round. "A rat, I suppose," he muttered. Yet he continued to peer with suspicion into the corner whence the sound

had come, and presently he heard it again. The next instant he sprang to his feet; phantom-like a door in the panelled wall at the back of the room —a door in the wall where there should have been no door—was swinging, nay, had swung open. While he glared at it, hardly believing his senses, a man appeared standing in the dark aperture.

The man was young and of middle height. Dazzled by the light, and suffering apparently from weakness, he paused, leaning for support against the doorway. His eyes were bright, his sunken cheeks told of fever or famine. His clothes stained and dusty, and his unkempt hair, added to the wildness of his appearance. For a moment he and the owner of the room glared at one another in speechless wonder. Then a name sprang to the lips of each.

"Monsieur Mirande!" the younger man muttered.

"De Bercy!" exclaimed the other.

The stranger said no more, but shaking with agitation walked to a chair and sat down. Mirande, his face rigid with passion, stood in silence and watched him do it. Then the Republican found his voice.

"You villain!" he cried, advancing a step, his manner menacing. "Was it not enough that you stole into my house and robbed me of my daughter? Was it not enough that you led her to forfeit her life in your plots and then left her to die?

Was not this enough, that you now come and insult me by your presence?"

The young man raised his hand in deprecation, but seemed unable to reply. Mirande, gazing pitilessly at him, presently read his silence aright, and an expression of cruel joy altered his features.

"I understand," he said grimly. "I see all now. You have been in hiding here. To be sure, your name has been on the list of suspects these three months. And you all the time have been starving like a rat behind the panels! Well, you shall have food and wine. You shall eat, you shall drink. I would not for the world have you cheat the guillotine."

He went to a cupboard as he spoke, and, taking from it bread and wine, he placed them before the other. The young man made a slight gesture, as though he would have refused them; but his pale face flushed with desire negatived the action, the momentary resistance of his pride gave way, and he ate and drank, sparingly, yet with the craving of a man half-famished.

"I have not tasted food for three days," he murmured presently, looking up with a glance of apology. The wine had already done its work. He looked a different man. His hand was steady, his cheeks wore a more healthy colour. "M. Chareloi hid me here," he went on, "but a week ago I heard a disturbance in the house, and com-

ing out when all was quiet I found it empty and locked. I fear he was arrested."

"He was guillotined five days ago," the Girondin replied with brutal frankness.

"Why? For what?" the young man exclaimed.

"As a suspect," Mirande answered, shrugging his shoulders.

Bercy had partly risen from his chair. He sat down again, stunned.

"Things move quickly nowadays," Mirande continued, with a ferocious smile. "To the Luxembourg, thence to the Conciergerie, thence to the Place de la Revolution is a journey of three days at most; and the path is well trodden. You will find yourself in good company, M. de Bercy."

"You will give me up?"

"Ay!" the Republican answered hoarsely. He had risen, and stood facing his antagonist, his hands on the table, his face flushed and swollen. "Ay, though you were my own son! What have you not done to me? You crept like a snake into my house, and robbed me of my daughter!"

"I made her my wife!" the Vicomte answered, with calm pride.

"Ay, and then? After that act of mighty condescension you led her to take part in your vile plot, and when she was discovered and arrested, you left her to pay the penalty. You left her to

die alone rather than risk one hair of your miserable head!"

The young man sprang to his feet in sudden ungovernable excitement. "It is false!" he cried. "False!"

"It is true!" Mirande retorted, striking the table so violently that the room rang again and the flame of the lamp leapt up and for an instant dyed the two angry faces with a lurid gleam.

"I say it is false!" the Vicomte replied sternly. "On the contrary, being at Rheims when I heard that Corinne was arrested, I took horse on the instant. I rode for Paris as a man rides for life. I was anxious to give myself up in her place if I could save her in no other way. But at Meaux, M. Mirande, I met your agent——"

"And went back to Rheims again and into hiding," the other continued, with a bitter sneer, "after sending me, her father, the shameful message that your duty to your race forbade the last of the Bercys to die for a merchant's daughter."

"I sent that message, do you say? I? I?" the young man cried.

"Yes, you! Who else? You—sent it after hearing from me that if you would surrender, the Committee of Safety would suffer her to escape! So much my services had wrung from them—in vain. What? Do you deny that you met my agent at night in the yard of the Three Kings at Meaux, M. le Vicomte?"

"I met him," the young man answered firmly, though his frame was a-shake with excitement. "But I did not send that message by him! Nor did he give me such a message as you state. On the contrary, he told me that I was too late, that my wife had suffered two days before; and that you bade me save myself, if I could."

"Ay, she suffered," Mirande answered ironically. "But it was four days later. And for the rest you tell me nothing but lies, and clumsy ones."

"What I tell you," the Vicomte rejoined, with a solemnity which at last enforced the other's attention, "is as true as that I loved my wife and would have died to save her. I swear it!"

M. Mirande passed his hand over his brow, and stood for a moment gazing at his son-in-law. There was a new expression, an expression almost of fear, in his eyes.

"Should you know the messenger again?" he asked at last.

"I do not think I should," the Vicomte answered. "He inquired for me by the name upon which we had agreed. We were together for a few minutes only, and the night was dark, the only light a distant lanthorn."

"Would he know you, do you think?"

"I cannot say."

M. Mirande shrugged his shoulders, and strode half a dozen times up and down the room, his face dark with thought, with suspicion, with uncer-

tainty. At length he stopped before his son-in-law.

"Listen to me," he said, meeting and striving to read the young man's eyes. "It is possible that what you say is true and that you are not the coward I have thought you. In that case you shall have justice at my hands. Before I give you up to the Committee of Safety, who will deal shortly with you, I will resolve the doubt. Until I find the means to solve it, you may stay here."

"Indeed?" cried the young man proudly. "But what if I am not willing to be beholden to you?"

"Then you have your alternative!" Mirande answered coolly. "Come with me to the nearest Guard House, and I will inform against you. After all, it will be the shortest way. It was only that being a citizen, and not a *ci-devant*, I wished to do justice—even to you."

The young man hesitated. He had spoken truly when he suggested that he was unwilling to be beholden to Mirande. But the alternative meant certain death.

"I will stop," he said, after a pause, shrugging his shoulders as he accepted the strange offer made him. "Why should I not? It is your agent who has lied, not I."

"We shall see," replied the other, without emotion. "There is one thing, however, I must name to you. I know that you are a gallant among the ladies, M. de Bercy. My daughter Claire, who

was at the seminary when you visited me before, is now at home. You will kindly restrict your intercourse with her to the most formal limits. Unfortunately," he continued, with a strange bitterness in his tone, "she is like her sister, and the same arts that won the one, may win the other from the path of duty."

"For shame, sir!" the young noble answered, his eyes sparkling with indignation. "You insult, not me, but your dead daughter! Do you think that I loved her for her fortune alone? Or that her very image, untenanted by her soul, would satisfy me?"

"They were singularly alike," Mirande muttered with a grim shrug. "God knows! At any rate you are warned."

The young man shot at him an angry glance, but said no more; and Mirande, seeming to be satisfied that his condition was accepted, dropped the subject and proceeded to show his guest where he might sleep; for the latter felt a natural reluctance to return to his narrow prison behind the wainscot. In a few minutes the light was extinguished and the two men, thus strangely brought together again, lay a few feet from one another; the mind of each turning in the stillness of the night, to the link which had bound them, nay, which still bound them in a forced and uncongenial union.

The Vicomte was aware that his host ran a

certain risk in sheltering him. The supremacy which Robespierre had won at this time, and the desperate lengths to which he had gone, exposed all who were not of his immediate following to a jealousy that had already hurried to the guillotine the chiefs of half a dozen sections of the Republican party. Mirande, as one of the few surviving Girondins and as a man still possessing friends and influence was peculiarly obnoxious to suspicion. The slightest accusation, the word of a servant, the hint of a rival, would suffice to despatch him also along the path which so many trod daily.

The Vicomte, therefore, on rising in the morning, proposed to withdraw to his hiding-place. M. Mirande, however, a little to his guest's surprise, would not hear of this; observing curtly that he could trust his household, and that a change of name was all that safety required. The younger man, whose anxiety was not on his own account only, would have argued the point; but his host cut short the matter by opening the door, and ushering the Vicomte, almost before the young man was aware, into another room—a room, large and scantily furnished, but in other respects in striking contrast to that which he had left. Here the tall, narrow windows, three in number, were open; the sunlight poured in through half-closed jalousies and fell in bars on the shining parquet, and on a little table daintily laid for the

morning meal and gay with flowers. In the cooler and darker parts of the room stood high-backed chairs littered with a dozen articles which spoke of a woman's presence; here a fan and silk hood, there a half-mended glove. As the young man's eyes fell on these, and he drank in the airy brightness and even luxury of the room, he felt a strange pang of regret and misery. Such things were no longer for him. Such prettinesses no longer formed part of his life. And then he turned, and in an instant forgot his unhappiness and his loss in the sight of a young girl who, seated a little aside, had risen at his entrance and now stood facing him, her back to the light.

He had been warned; yet he stood thunderstruck, breathless, staring. His eyes grew large, his jaw fell, the room for a moment went round with him. The likeness of the woman before him to his dead wife was so strong, so complete, so astonishing, that involuntarily, not knowing what he did, he held out his hands.

"Corinne!" he muttered, his voice full of tears. "Corinne!"

The girl, who but for the ravages of ill-health would have been very beautiful, did not answer; nevertheless she seemed scarcely less affected by his sudden appearance and his strange address. She swayed on her feet, and had she not grasped a chair would have fallen. A burning flush for an instant lit up her wan cheek, to disappear at the

first sound of her father's voice. He had followed Bercy into the room, and his tone was sharp with reproof and warning.

"Citizen Perrot," he said sternly, "this is my daughter Claire. Here is your place. Be seated, if you please."

The Vicomte mechanically did as he was told without looking where he sat. His hands shook, his brain was on fire. He had eyes only for the girl; who was so wondrously, so completely, like his wife. She had taken her seat with some timidity at the other side of the table, and if she no longer betrayed the same emotion, her eyes were downcast, the colour fluttered in her cheeks. It was in vain that Mirande shot angry glances at her—and at him. The young man stared as one enchanted, seeing only the white-robed figure seated between himself and the sunlight, that, shining through her dark hair, found golden threads in it, and crowned the face he knew so well with an aureole of brightness.

Gradually the spell fell from him. For as he looked, the girl's face changed and hardened and grew older; grew sharper and whiter; and he discerned the difference between Claire and Corinne. Corinne had never looked at him, or at any one, after that fashion. With a sigh, yet with eyes that often and involuntarily returned to the lode-star, he recovered himself; and he made, or pretended to make, a meal. His appetite, how-

ever, was gone, and he was thankful when his host rose and put an end to the constrained sitting.

"You will excuse me," the Republican said, drawing out his watch and looking at it. "I should be at M. Carnot's at this hour. These rooms, however, are at your disposal, my friend; and if you want books, my daughter will direct you where to find them. But—caution, remember!"

And with that, to the Vicomte's astonishment, M. Mirande departed, leaving the two together. For a moment the young man sat, troubled and perplexed, gazing at the floor. He had intercepted the glance of warning which his host on leaving had aimed at his daughter; and with the knowledge that he was suspected, with the brutally frank exhortation addressed to himself fresh in his mind, to be left alone with the girl surprised him beyond measure.

Presently he stole a look at her. She had passed to one of the windows, and, having seated herself, was employed upon some needle-work. Her attitude, the lines of her figure, the pose of her head, presented the same abnormal maddening resemblance to his wife; and slowly, as if fascinated, he moved nearer to her.

"Pardon me," he said at last, speaking almost in a whisper. "You are very like your sister, mademoiselle."

She glanced quickly at him, her face wearing

the hard, sharp look that had slowly grown upon it. But she gave him no other answer.

He felt that he ought to leave her, but the spell was upon him and he lingered.

"You have been ill, I fear," he said, after a long silence.

"Monsieur is right," she answered briefly. "The times are such that few of us escape. Those are perhaps most happy," and as she paused on the word she looked up at him, "who die with their beliefs unshattered, before discovering the clay feet of their idols."

He started.

"Mademoiselle!" he cried almost fiercely, carried away by an intensely painful thought. "My wife! Your sister? Answer me, answer me quickly, I beg of you. They did not—they did not tell her that I—that I refused——"

"That monsieur declined to save her?" Mademoiselle Claire answered slowly, her great dark eyes looking into vacancy—into the depths of gloomy memories. "Yes, they did. A woman, perhaps, would not have done it; would not have borne to do it. But men are cruel—cruel! And after all it helped her to die, you understand. It made it more easy."

He walked to the other end of the room, his face hidden in his hands. And there his frame began to be racked by deep sobs. He tried to summon up his pride, his courage, his manliness;

but in vain. The thought that the woman who had loved and trusted him, his young wife—his young wife of a few months only—had died believing him a coward and an ingrate was too bitter! Too bitter, the conviction that, mistaken as her belief was, it could never be altered! Never be altered! She would never know!

A light touch on his arm recalled him to himself. He turned and found Mademoiselle Claire at his elbow holding a glass of wine towards him. Her lips were compressed, but her face wore a delicate flush, and her eyes were changed and softened.

"Drink," she muttered hurriedly. "You are still weak; you have eaten nothing."

He controlled himself by an effort and took the wine; and the girl, moving away quickly, brought from the table a roll and, without again meeting his eyes, laid it on a chair beside him. She was in the act of regaining her place by the window, when the door opened somewhat abruptly, and the young Vicomte, scarcely master of himself, turned and discovered a man standing on the threshold.

The stranger stared at him and he at the stranger, while Mademoiselle Claire, with eyes which on a sudden became keen and intent, seemed to forget herself in gazing on both. The new-comer was taller than the Vicomte and of about the same age; a thin, lithe man, with restless eyes and dark, tumbled hair. He scanned the Vicomte with

at least as much disfavour as the latter, taken by surprise, spent on him; and he was the first to speak.

"I thought that you were alone, mademoiselle," he said, frowning as he advanced into the room and looked about him suspiciously.

"This is a friend of my father's," she answered. "He is staying with us, M. Baudouin."

The explanation did not seem to improve matters in the young man's eyes. He frowned still more gloomily.

"Monsieur is from the country?" he asked.

"No," the Vicomte answered. "I have been in Paris some months."

The stranger looked darkly down, toying with a book which lay at the edge of the table. The girl waited awhile and then—

"Did you bring a message from my father?" she asked, a slight tinge of impatience and hauteur in her manner.

"No, mademoiselle, I have not seen him this morning," he answered. And his sullenness matched her impatience.

"Had you not better follow him then?" she said, with sharpness. "He is at M. Carnot's. He may need you."

For a moment it was plain that M. Baudouin hesitated, but in the end he made up his mind to obey, and bowing with exaggerated respect he left the room.

The Vicomte thought that he could not do better than follow the other's example, and he too withdrew. Crossing the lobby to the room which communicated with his hiding-place he threw himself into a chair and gave himself up to the most melancholy reflections. The singular resemblance which Mademoiselle Claire bore to his wife must alone have sufficed to fill him with vain longings and poignant regrets; but these were now rendered a thousand times more bitter by the knowledge, so cruelly conveyed to him, that his wife had died believing him a heartless and faithless coward.

The return of M. Mirande later in the day, if it did not dispel these gloomy thoughts, compelled him at any rate to conceal them. The evening meal passed much as the morning one had passed; the host uttering a few formal phrases, while the other two sat for the most part silent. The Vicomte could not avert his eyes from his sister-in-law; and though he no longer felt the violent emotions which her face had at first awakened in him, he sat sad and unhappy. Her pale features reminded him of the dead past: and at once tortured him with regret, and tantalized him with the simulacrum of that which had been his. He could have cursed the Heaven that had formed two beings so much alike.

In this way a week passed by, and little by little a vague discomfort and restlessness began to characterize the attitude of his mind towards

her. He felt himself at once attracted by her beauty—as what man of his years would not? —and repelled by the likeness that made of the feeling a sacrilege. Meantime, whether he would or no, they were left together—much together. M. Mirande went abroad each day and seemed intent on public affairs. Each day, indeed, his look grew a trifle more austere, and the shade on his brow grew deeper; but though it was evident that the situation out-of-doors was growing more strained, the storms which were agitating Paris and desolating so many homes affected the little household in no other way. The Vicomte kept necessarily within, spending most of his time in reading. Mademoiselle Claire also went seldom abroad; and it followed that during the long July days when the sunshine flooded the second floor, in the early mornings when the sparrows perched on the open jalousies and twittered gaily, or in the grey evenings, when the night fell slowly, they met from time to time—met not infrequently. On such occasions the Vicomte noticed that Baudouin was never far distant. The secretary, as a rule, put in an appearance before the conversation had lasted ten minutes.

Bercy began to suspect the cause of this, and one day he happened upon a discovery. He was sitting in M. Mirande's room, when the sound of a raised voice made him lay down his book and listen. The voice seemed to come from the

parlour. Once he was assured of this, and that the speaker, whose anger was apparent, was not Mirande, he took his steps. He stole out upon the lobby, and found the parlour door as he had suspected slightly ajar. Any scruples he might have entertained were dispelled by the certainty that the speaker was Baudouin and that the person whom he was addressing in harsh and vehement tones, was Mademoiselle Claire. The Vicomte drew himself up behind the door and listened.

"What would I have?" were the first words he caught. "Little enough, heaven knows! Little enough! What have I ever asked except to be allowed to serve? To gratify your least caprice. To be at your beck and call. To fetch and carry while another basked in your smiles. That is all I asked in the old days and I ask no more now. I am content to serve and wait and hope. But I will have—no stranger come between us. Not again! Not again!"

"You do not understand, M. Baudouin," the girl answered hurriedly.

"Do I not?" he cried. "Perhaps I did not understand last time. But this time I do. I do! It had been well for you had I known more then!"

"Spare me," she said faintly, overcome apparently by some hidden meaning in his words.

"That you may amuse yourself with this stranger?" he retorted. "No, I have given way

enough. It had been better, as I say, if I had not, mademoiselle."

The stress he laid on the last word was unintelligible to the hidden listener, who knew only that it veiled an insult and drew nearer to the door. The girl remained silent and Baudouin presuming on this continued in a tone still more aggressive, "Times are changed, mademoiselle, changed in the last month. You, living out of the world, are ignorant of what is passing, and your father is being left as completely behind. Unless I make a mistake, in a little time you will need other and stronger protection than his."

"Not while he lives," the girl answered, in a low tone.

Baudouin laughed. "The pitcher goes often to the well, but it is broken at last," he said drily. "I would have you understand that, since you may stand in need of my help, you would do well not to try me too far."

"M. Baudouin," the girl said abruptly—and her tone was changed, and the listener, though he could not see her, could picture the challenge of her startled eyes—"you have never spoken to me in this way before. You have changed."

"So are the times. Those who were servants are now masters!"

"You will never be mine," the girl said firmly.

"We shall see!" he answered.

"We shall see!" cried an unexpected voice—

that of the Vicomte, who could bear it no longer. His eyes stern, his colour high, he flung the door wide and entered. The secretary, startled, stepped back a pace. The girl, who had been standing close to the door, turned, and seeing who it was, uttered a low cry of thankfulness; in her relief she even stretched out her hands as if she would grasp the new-comer's arm. The next instant she drew back, a strange expression in her eyes.

"Now, sir," the young Vicomte continued, harshly, "you have to deal with a man, and not with a woman whom you can terrify. I have overheard all, and I warn you that on his return I shall repeat it word for word to M. Mirande, who will know how to deal with you."

He expected that the threat would produce its effect, and that the secretary taken in the act would resume his normal demeanour. But Baudouin, his first surprise over, merely smiled. "Who are you, I wonder," he replied grimly. "One in the Tallien-Barrère-Carnot conspiracy, that's afoot, I suppose. If so, I need not——"

"You need suppose nothing!" the Vicomte retorted fiercely. "But leave the room without words, you dog!"

"Thank you," said the secretary, smiling contemptuously. "But I would have you remember that a living dog is better than a dead lion."

With that—and with little show of embarrass-

ment or dismay—he went out. As the door closed behind him a singular constraint fell upon the two who were left. The Vicomte, with a grave face, paused by the table, and stood listening to the sound of his retreating footsteps. The girl, who had withdrawn to the farther end of the room, kept her face averted. The Vicomte looked at her doubtfully—looked at her more than once. "Mademoiselle," he ventured at last, his voice low and agitated, "I am afraid he—I am afraid he means mischief."

"I fear so," she whispered without turning.

"Will you—shall I speak to your father?"

"It may be better," she answered—in the same tone.

He looked at her long at that, but she did not move; and with a gesture as of farewell he turned and went softly away. Safe in his own room, with the door shut, he stood in the middle of the floor thinking; thinking not of the secretary nor of the danger with which Baudouin's enmity threatened the house, but of the strange look which the girl's face had worn on his first appearance at her side, the look of relief and thankfulness which he had surprised in her eyes, the impulse of confidence which had made her move towards him! He recalled them all, and his brow grew hot, his hand trembled. He felt at once terror and shame. When he heard M. Mirande's step on the stairs, he gave himself no time for thought, but went

hurriedly out on the lobby and called him into the room. "M. Mirande," he said, "I have something to tell you. I have two things to tell you."

The Republican looked at him, his inscrutable eyes betraying no surprise. "What are they?" he asked, his tone almost phlegmatic.

"The man Baudouin has been here, addressing himself so rudely to your daughter that I felt myself obliged to—to interfere."

"That is unlucky."

"It may be that he has your confidence," the young Vicomte continued, "but, from the way in which he spoke of you, I doubt if you have his. He seemed to me—a dangerous man, M. Baudouin."

"Did he use threats?" the Republican asked, a slight shade of anxiety in his tone.

The Vicomte nodded.

"Did he mention any names?" M. Mirande continued, looking sharply at his watch.

"Yes. Those of Carnot, Barrère—and I think, Tallien."

"Ah!" For a moment M. Mirande's impulse seemed to be to leave the room; to leave it hurriedly, to go back perhaps whence he had come. But he thought better of it, and after a pause he continued, "Had you not something else to tell me?"

"I had," the young man answered, betraying, by his agitation, that he had now come to the

real purpose for which he had sought the interview. "I wish to leave, M. Mirande. I wish to leave your house at once. I do not know," he continued hurriedly, before the elder man could utter the dry retort which was on his lips, "whether you had it in your mind to try me by leaving me with your daughter, or whether I have only my own weakness to thank. But I must go. I am ashamed of myself, I hate myself for it; but I cannot be with her and not feel what I ought not to feel. Understand me," the young man continued, his cheeks pale; "it is not by reason of any charm of hers, but because she is so like—so like my wife—because she seems a dozen times a day to be my wife, that my memory is unfaithful to Corinne—that I dare not remain here another day!"

He stopped abruptly. M. Mirande coughed.

"This is a strange confession," he said, after a long pause. "You have said nothing to Claire?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Then say nothing!" the Republican replied with curt decision. "As for leaving this place to-day, it is impossible. A crisis is at hand; this house is watched. You would be recognized and arrested before you passed ten yards from the door. Moreover," he went on, seeming to ponder deeply as he spoke, "if you are right about Baudouin—and I doubt now whether I have been wise to trust him — I see great and immediate

danger before me. Therefore, if you would not desert the sinking ship, you must remain."

"I dare not," the young man muttered, shaking his head.

"What?" the old Girondin answered, his voice swelling, his eyes growing bright. "You a noble, and you dare not? You a noble, and you cannot govern yourself? Consider, M. le Vicomte! A few days may see me traverse the road so many traverse every day; the road of the guillotine. Then my daughter will be alone, defenceless, unprotected. I ask you—for I have no one else to whom I can turn—to be her brother and her guardian. Do you refuse?"

"You no longer distrust me?" the Vicomte muttered, his cheek hot.

"When you came to me a week ago," Mirande answered, "I did not foresee this crisis, nor the present danger. If I had, I might have received you differently. But, see you, what if this be the way in which I would try you?" he continued with energy. "What if this be the atonement heaven has assigned to you? In that case, do you accept, or do you refuse?"

"I accept," the Vicomte answered solemnly, carried away by the other's burst of feeling. "I accept the charge."

M. Mirande smiled, but only for a moment. Quickly the light died out of his face, leaving it stern and austere. His brow grew dark, and turn-

ing with a sigh to his table, he signed to his companion to leave him, and was presently immersed in figures and calculations.

The young man retired; on his side full of doubt and amazement, yet lifted by the other's appeal to a higher level of will and purpose. Confidence begets honour. Frankly as he had gone to the Girondin with his confession, so frankly had the other received it. Now he felt that it behoved him to deserve confidence. Henceforth Claire must be his sister. But he knew that merely to call her sister was not all. He knew enough of his own weakness to recognize the necessity of shunning temptation, and during the next three days he was careful to avoid conversation with the girl; who on her part seemed to observe nothing, but went to and fro about her household duties.

And yet she did not go about them as usual, a keen observer would have said. A subtle change had come over her. Alone in her room she sang to herself low crooning songs of happiness. Her eyes, so carefully lowered in the parlour, shone with a tender brightness, when no one saw them. Her cheek had grown fuller, her colour stronger, her whole being radiant. If she still went delicately when other's eyes were upon her, it was rather in sympathy with the heavy air of fear and expectation which pervaded the house, which pervaded the city, than in obedience to her natural impulses.

On the third evening, M. Mirande, who had been abroad all day, came home rather later than usual. The Vicomte and Claire were sitting in separate rooms, but something ominous in the sound of his footstep as he mounted the stairs, drew them both to the lobby to receive him. The evening light, shining through the window behind them, fell full upon his face and exaggerated its cold and grey severity. They waited for him in silence, and he did not see them until he set his foot on the last step. Then he pointed to his room, and, "Go in there, my children," he said gravely.

The young man started. The girl blushed and trembled. They both obeyed. M. Mirande's next act was equally surprising. Following them into the room he proceeded to lock and bolt the door behind him; and then passing quickly to the window he looked out. For a moment they stood behind him in silence. After a pause the Vicomte spoke.

"What is it?" he said.

"The order for my arrest was signed an hour ago," the Girondin answered, his eyes still glued to the window. "You are both included in it. Ah! here they are!"

"Who?" the Vicomte asked with energy.

"Baudouin and three officers. However, the door is shut. It is strong, and will gain us a few minutes."

"To what end?" The Vicomte spoke coldly. Mirande's conduct took him by surprise, for resistance to arrest was rare during the Revolution. Such men as Mirande, courageous, bigoted, devoted to an ideal, made a point—unless they resorted to suicide—of submitting calmly to destiny and the law.

The Girondin, however, had decided otherwise. Nor did he seem to be aware of his companion's disapproval. He did not answer, but continued to look out long after the tramp of heavy footsteps on the stairs had drawn his daughter to his side. There was a loud summons without, "In the name of the law!" but the three remained silent, standing close together, the girl's white, scared face glimmering in the increasing darkness of the room. The Vicomte a foot from her, could almost hear the dull beating of her heart.

"Can nothing be done?" he muttered.

"We can do nothing but wait and be silent," the Republican answered calmly. "They know we are here, but if we do not answer, they may pause awhile before they attack the door. And every moment—is a moment gained."

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders, but acquiesced; and some minutes elapsed—minutes which seemed hours to more than one of the three—before the locksmith for whom the Commissary had sent, assailed the door, and the almost empty house rang with the harsh sounds of his hammer.

Crash! The door was open at last, letting into the room a flood of light, and with the light three men who entered with levelled arms. The foremost, an officer girt with a huge tricolour scarf, stopped abruptly, his jaw dropping ludicrously as his eyes fell on the placid group before him. "Citizen Achille Mirande?" he said interrogatively. "Yes? I am empowered to arrest you in the name of the Committee of Safety; you, your daughter also present I think—and a guest. This I presume is the person?"

"It is," Mirande answered quietly. "Perhaps you will permit me to show you where my papers are. They may be needed?"

"They will be needed," the Commissary replied, re-arranging his scarf, which had been pulled awry. "You may certainly collect them under surveillance."

"I can save M. Mirande the trouble," remarked a mocking voice in the background. "I think I can lay my hand on any paper that may be required."

"I do not doubt it, Baudouin," the Girondin answered placidly. "I take it that I have to thank you for this?"

There was shame as well as triumph in the secretary's eyes as he came forward. "You cannot say I did not warn you," he said, avoiding the look of scorn which Claire—who stood by her father's side, her hand in his—shot at him. "But you would go your way."

"And you, yours!" Mirande retorted. "An old way—Judas's. But hark you, my friend! You seem to be prospering now. You have kicked down the ladder by which you have risen. Yet it is in my power to wound you. See you, do you know who this is?" and he pointed to the Vicomte who, with his arms folded, was gazing haughtily at the Commissary and his followers.

"A conspirator against the safety of the Republic—that is all I know," Baudouin answered sullenly.

"Possibly," said Mirande. "But not the less for that my son-in-law!"

"The Vicomte de Bercy!" Baudouin almost shouted. "It is false. I heard of him but yesterday—at Nantes."

"You heard wrongly then!" Mirande answered with a cold sneer. "This is the man whom you met at Meaux, and of whom you lied to me, saying—that you might divide him effectually from my daughter—that he refused to surrender himself to save her."

"It was true—what I told you," the secretary muttered, gazing at Bercy with hatred.

"It was false!" cried the Girondin sternly. "Do I need evidence? I have it. Whom shall I believe, you, who have betrayed me to-day, or he who remained by my side in danger?"

"He could not escape," Baudouin said abruptly. His face was pale, the perspiration stood on his

brow. His jealous eyes glared askance at the girl's face. Mirande had said rightly. He had yet the power to wound this traitor.

"He did not attempt it," the Girondin answered. "And besides, I have tried him as gold in the fire! Look you at this. Bercy!" As the name rang through the room the speaker turned to the Vicomte and took his hand, "My friend, I have deceived you. My daughter did not die. I procured her pardon by the use of such influence as I possessed at that time. But having done that, deluded by this villain's tale, I forced her to renounce you and to take her maiden name."

For an instant there was silence in the room.

"She did not die?" the young man muttered, his eyes dilating. Then, before an answer could be given, he plucked his hand from Mirande's grasp and seizing him by the shoulder shook him to and fro.

"Where is she?" he cried hoarsely. "Speak, man, what have you done with her? Where is she?"

"She is behind you."

Bercy turned. Claire was behind him. "Claire?" he cried. "Claire?"

The girl stood, her eyes slightly downcast, her arms hanging by her sides. And then at the sound of the name uttered a second time, she looked up, her eyes swimming with love and tears. "No, Corinne!" she said simply. And then, in a voice which pierced the traitor's bosom as with

a sword, she continued, "Honoré, my husband! Forgive me! Forgive me that I distrusted you! That I disowned you!"

He did not answer, but he opened his arms and took her into them and held her there; while the father went to the window—perhaps to hide his emotion, and the Commissary lifted up his hands in admiration genuine and French of this moving scene. As for Baudouin, he bit his nails, his face white with rage.

He cursed the delay. He would have cursed the police, had he dared, and had not the tricolour scarf awed him. "Bah!" he exclaimed at last in venomous tones, "a fine piece of play-acting, M. Mirande! And our friends here have indulgently given you time for it. But it is over, and the sequel will be less pleasant, I fear. He laughs best who laughs last."

"That is true," Mirande answered soberly; and for an instant from his place at the window, he looked into the room.

"In three days you will sneeze into the sack, my friends," Baudouin continued with savage mockery. "Your married bliss, M. le Vicomte, will last but a short time, I fear. As for mademoiselle, Sanson will prove but a rough coiffeur, I doubt."

"Silence!" the Girondin cried; and his tone was strangely altered, his voice vibrated strangely through the room. "Silence, you hound!" he continued, turning from the window and walking into

the middle of the chamber, his figure drawn to its full height, his hand outstretched. "Be still, and tremble for your own head. The warrant you bring is signed by Maximilien Robespierre?"

"The Incorruptible," murmured the Commissary. And saluted.

"Corruptible or Incorruptible," Mirande rejoined, with a sneer, "he is fallen! He is fallen! Within the last ten minutes he has been arrested and lodged in the Tuileries!"

"You rave!" cried the officer. While Bercy and Corinne cast dazed glances about them, and the other men stared in stupid wonder.

"I do not rave!" the Girondin answered, standing in the middle of the room, the master of the situation. "I tell but the fact. Mark the three lighted candles in yonder upper window. They are a signal that Robespierre is arrested. Go, if you doubt me, and ask. Or—you need not. Listen, listen!" With a gesture of command, he raised his hand, and all stood silent. For an instant there seemed equal silence in the streets below; but gradually as they listened there grew out of this silence a distant hollow murmur, as of a great sea swelling higher and louder with each moment. The face of more than one in the room lost its colour.

"The Faubourgs are rising," muttered the Commissary uneasily. "There is something amiss."

"On the contrary," answered the Girondin quietly, "there is nothing amiss, but things are

in a fair way to be set straight. If you will take my advice you will tear up that warrant, my friend. To-morrow it will be more dangerous to you than to me. The Terror of these days is over," he continued solemnly. "For those who have profited by it the reckoning remains!"

M. Mirande was right. Abruptly as this narration ends, the Terror, so famous in history, came to its end; and many a life held worthless a few minutes before was saved. For twenty-four hours indeed the fate of Robespierre and indirectly of our friends hung in the balance, all men trembling and watching what would happen and who would prevail. Then he fell, and the cruelty of his rule recoiled on his associates. What became of Baudouin is not known for certain, though one tale alleges that he was met and murdered by a company of Royalists near Nantes, and another, that he was guillotined under another name with Fouquier Tinville and his gang. Enough that he disappeared unmarked and unregretted, along with many others of the baser and more obscure adventurers of the time.

Of Bercy and Corinne, re-wedded under circumstances so strange and so abnormal, we know only that their descendants, well versed in this tradition of the family, still flourish on the Loire, and often and often tell this tale under the walnut-trees on summer evenings. Nor are there wanting to-day both a Corinne and a Claire.

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!

On the moorland above the old grey village of Carhaix, in Finistère—Finistère, the most westerly province of Brittany—stands a cottage, built, as all the cottages in that country are, of rough-hewn stones. It is a poor, rude place to-day, but it wore an aspect still more rude and primitive a hundred years ago—on an August day in the year 1793, when a man issued from the low doorway, and, shading his eyes from the noonday sun, gazed long and fixedly in the direction of a narrow rift which a few score paces away breaks the monotony of the upland level. The man was tall and thin and unkempt, and his features, which expressed a mixture of cunning and simplicity, matched his figure. He gazed a while in silence, but at length he uttered a grunt of satisfaction as the figure of a woman rose gradually into sight. She came slowly towards him in a stooping posture, dragging behind her a great load of straw, which completely hid the little sledge on which it rested, and which was attached to her waist by a rope of twisted hay.

The figure of a woman—rather of a girl. As she drew nearer it could be seen that her cheeks,

though brown and sunburned, were as smooth as a child's. She seemed to be still in her teens. Her head was bare, and her short petticoats, of some coarse stuff, left visible bare feet thrust into wooden shoes. She advanced with her head bent, and her shoulders strained forward, her face dull and patient. Once, and once only, when the man's eyes left her for a moment, she shot at him a look of scared apprehension; and later, when she came abreast of him, her breath coming and going with her exertions, he might have seen, had he looked closely, that her strong brown limbs were trembling under her.

But the man noticed nothing in his impatience, and only chid her for her slowness. "Where have you been dawdling, lazy-bones?" he cried.

She murmured, without halting, that the sun was hot.

"Sun hot!" he retorted. "Jeanne is lazy, that is it! *Mon Dieu*, that I should have married a wife who is tired by noon! I had better have left you to that never-do-well Pierre Bounat. But I have news for you, my girl."

He lounged after her as he spoke, his low cunning face—the face of the worst kind of French peasant—flickering with cruel pleasure, as he saw how she winced at the name he had mentioned. She made him no answer, however. Instead, she drew her load with increased vehemence towards one of the two doors which led into the build-

ing. "Well, well, I will tell you presently," he called after her. "Be quick and come to dinner."

He entered himself by the other door. The house was divided into two chambers by a breast-high partition of wood. The one room served for kitchen; the other, now half full of straw, was barn and granary, fowl-house and dove-cote, all in one. "Be quick!" he called to her. Standing in the house-room, he could see her head as she proceeded to unload the straw.

After a few minutes she came in, her shoes clattering on the floor. The perspiration stood in great beads on her forehead, and showed how little she had deserved his reproach. She took her seat silently, avoiding his eyes with some care; but he thought nothing of this. It was no new thing. It pleased him, if anything.

He liked to be feared. "Well, my Jeanne," he said, in his gibing tone, "are you longing for my news?"

The hand she extended towards the pitcher of cider, that, with black bread and onions, made up their meal, shook a little; but she answered simply, "If you please, Michel."

"Well, the Girondins have got the worst of it, my girl, and are flying all over the country. That is the news. Your Pierre is among them, I don't doubt, if he has not been killed already. I wish he would come this way."

"Why?" she asked; and as she spoke looked up at last, a flash of light in her grey eyes.

"Why?" he repeated, grinning across the table at her, "because he would be worth five crowns to me. There is five crowns, I am told, on the head of every Girondin who has been in arms, my girl. Five crowns! It is not every day we can earn five crowns!"

The French Revolution, it will be understood, was at its height. The more moderate and constitutional Republicans—the Girondins, as they were called—worsted in Paris by the Jacobins and the mob, had lately tried to raise the provinces against the capital, and to this end had drawn together at Caen, near the border of Brittany. They had been defeated, however, and the Jacobins, in this month of August, were preparing to take a fearful vengeance at once on them and on the Royalists. The Reign of Terror had begun. Even to such a boor as this, sitting over his black bread, in his remote hovel, the Revolution had come home, and, in common with many a thousand others, he wondered what he could make of it.

The girl did not answer, even by the look of contempt to which he had become accustomed, and for which he hated her, and for which he beat her; and he repeated, "Five crowns! Ah, it is money, that is! *Mon Dieu!*" Then, with a sudden exclamation, he sprang up. "What is that?" he cried.

He had been sitting with his back to the barn, but he turned, as he spoke, so as to face it. Something had startled him—a movement, a rustling in the straw behind him. "What is that?" he asked again, his hand on the table, his face lowering and watchful.

The girl had risen also; and, as the last word passed his lips, sprang by him with a low cry, and aimed a frantic blow with her stool at something he could not see, something low, on the floor.

"What is it?" he asked, recoiling.

"A rat!" she answered, breathless. And she aimed another blow at it.

"Where?" he asked sharply. "Where is it?" He snatched up his stool, too, and at that moment a rat darted out of the straw, ran nimbly between his legs, and plunged into a hole by the door. He flung the wooden stool after it; but in vain. "It was a rat!" he said, as if until then he had doubted it.

"Thank God!" she muttered. She was shaking all over.

He stared at her in stupid wonder. What did she mean? What had come to her? "Have you had a sunstroke my, girl?" he said suspiciously.

Her nut-brown face was a shade less brown than usual, but she met his eyes boldly. "No," she said, "I am all right." And she added an explanation that for the moment satisfied him. But

he did not sit down again, and when she went out he went out also. And though, as she retired slowly to the rye fields and her work, she repeatedly looked back at him, it was always to find his eyes fixed upon her. When this had happened half a dozen times, a thought struck him. "How now?" he muttered. "The rat ran out of the straw! Why?"

Nevertheless he continued to gaze after her, with a cunning look upon his features, until she disappeared over the edge of the rift. Then he crept back to the door of the barn, and stole in, exchanging the sunlight for the cool darkness of the raftered building, across which a dozen rays of light were shooting, laden with dancing motes. A pace or two from the door he stood stock still until he had regained the use of his eyes; then he began to peer round him. In a moment, far sooner than he expected, he found what he sought. Half upon, and half hidden by, the straw in the furthest corner, lay a young man, in the deep sleep of utter exhaustion. His face, which bore traces of more than common beauty, was white and pinched; his hair hung dank about his forehead. His clothes were in rags; and his feet, bound up with pieces torn at random from his blouse, were raw and bleeding. For a short time Michel Tellier bent over him, noting these things with glistening eyes. Then the peasant stole out again. "It is five crowns!" he mut-

tered, blinking in the sunlight. "Ha, ha! Five crowns!"

He looked round him cautiously, but could see no sign of his wife; and after hesitating and pondering a minute or two, he took the path for Carhaix, his native astuteness leading him to saunter at a slow pace after his ordinary fashion. When he was gone the moorland about the cottage lay still and deserted. Thrice, at intervals, the girl dragged home her load of straw, but on each occasion she seemed to linger in the barn no longer than was necessary. Michel's absence, though it was unlooked-for, raised no suspicion in her breast, for he would frequently go down to the village to spend the afternoon. The sun sank lower, and the shadow of the great monolith, which, on the crest of the highest point of the moor, at a distance of a mile, rose gaunt and black against a roseate sky, grew longer and longer; and then, as twilight fell, the two coming home met a few paces from the cottage. He asked some questions about the work she had been doing, and she answered briefly. Then, silent and uncommunicative, they went in together. The girl set the bread and cider on the table, and going to the great black pot which had been simmering all day upon the fire, poured some broth into two pitchers. It did not escape Michel's frugal eye that she was careful to leave a little broth in the bottom of the pot; and the fact induced a new feeling in him—

anger. When his wife invited him by a sign to the meal, he went instead to the door, and fastened it. Then he moved to the corner and picked up the wood-chopper, and armed with this he came back to his seat.

The girl watched his movements first with surprise, then with secret terror. The twilight was come, the cottage was almost dark, and she was alone with him; or, if not alone, yet with no one near who could help her. Nevertheless she met his grin of triumph bravely. "What is this?" she said. "Why do you want that?"

"For the rat," he answered grimly, his eyes on hers.

Her heart sank. "The rat?" she echoed.

"Ay!"

"Why not—your stool?" she strove to murmur.

"Not for this rat," he answered cunningly. "It might not do, my girl. Oh, I know what is to do," he continued, fingering the edge of the axe. "I have been down to the village, and seen the mayor, and he is coming up to fetch him." He nodded towards the partition, and she knew that her secret was known.

"It is Pierre," she said, trembling violently, and turning first crimson and then a dull sallow hue.

"I know it, Jeanne. It was excellent of you! Excellent! It is long since you have done such a day's work."

"You will not give him up?" she gasped.

"My faith, I shall!" he answered, affecting, and perhaps really feeling, wonder at her simplicity. "He is five crowns, my girl! You do not understand. He is worth five crowns and the risk nothing at all."

If he had been angry, if he had shown anything of the fury of the suspicious husband, if he had been about to do this out of jealousy or revenge or passion she would have quailed before him, though she had done him no wrong, save the wrong of mercy and pity. But his spirit was too mean for the great passions; he felt only the mean and sordid impulses, which to a woman are the most hateful. And instead of quailing, she looked at him with flashing eyes. "I shall warn him," she said.

"It will not help him," he answered, sitting still, and feeling anew the edge of the hatchet with his fingers.

"It will help him," she retorted. "He shall go. He shall escape before they come." She rose impetuously from her seat.

"I have locked the door!"

"Give me the key!" she panted. "Give me the key, I say!" She stood before him, her trembling hands outstretched, her figure drawn to its full height. Her look was such that he rose and retreated behind the table, still retaining the hatchet in his grasp.

"Stand back!" he said sullenly. "You may awaken him, if you please, my girl. It will not avail him. Do you not understand, fool, that he is worth five crowns? Five crowns? And listen! It is too late now. They are here!"

A blow fell on the door as he spoke, and he stepped towards it. But at that, seeing the last chance leaving her, despair moved her, she threw herself upon him; for a moment she wrestled with him like a wild-cat, but in the end he prevailed; he flung her off, and, brandishing his weapon in her face, kept her at bay. "You vixen!" he cried, retreating to the door, with a pale cheek and his eyes still on her, for he was an arrant coward. "You deserve to go to prison with him, you jade! I will have you in the stocks for this! I'll have you jailed!"

She leaned against the wall where he had flung her, her white despairing face seeming to shine in the darkness of the wretched room. Meanwhile the continuous murmur of men's voices outside the door could be heard mingled with the clatter of weapons; the summons for admission was repeated, and again repeated, as if those without had no mind to be kept waiting long.

"Patience! patience! I am opening!" he cried. Still keeping his face to her, he unlocked the door and called on the men to enter. "He is in the straw, M. le Maire!" he said, in a tone of triumph, his eyes still on his wife. "Cursed Girondin! He

will give you no trouble, I will answer it! But first give me my five crowns, M. le Maire. My five crowns!"

He felt, craven as he was, so much fear of his wife that he did not turn to see the men enter, and he was taken by surprise when a voice at his elbow—a voice he did not know—answered, "Five crowns, my friend? For what, may I ask?"

In his eagerness and greed he suspected nothing, but that on some pretext or other they were trying to filch from him his dues. "For what? For the Girondin!" he answered rapidly. Then at last he did turn and found that half a dozen men had entered, that more were entering. But to his astonishment, they were all strangers—men with stern, gloomy faces, and armed to the teeth. There was something so formidable, indeed, in their appearance that he stepped back, and his voice faltered as he added: "But where is the mayor, gentlemen? I do not see him."

No one answered, but in silence the last of the men—they were eleven in all—entered and bolted the door behind him. Michel Tellier peered at them in the gloom with growing alarm, nay, with growing terror. In return the tallest of the strangers, he who had entered first and seemed to command the others, looked round him keenly. And it was he who at length broke the silence. "So you have a Girondin here, have you?" he said, his voice curiously sweet and sonorous.

"I was to have five crowns for him," Michel muttered dubiously.

"Oh!" and then, "Pétion," the spokesman continued to one of his companions, "can you kindle a light? It strikes me that we have hit upon a dark place."

The man addressed took something from his pouch. For a moment there was silence, broken only by the sharp sound of the flint striking the steel. Then a slow-growing glare lit up the dark interior, and disclosed the group of cloaked strangers standing about the door, the light gleaming back from their trailing sabres and great horse-pistols. Michel trembled. He had never seen such men as these. True, they were wet and travel-stained, and had the air of those who spend their nights in ditches and under haystacks. But their pale, stern faces were set in indomitable resolve. Their eyes glowed with a steady fire, and they trod the mud floor as kings tread. Their leader was a man of majestic height and stern beauty, and in his eyes alone there seemed to lurk a spark of lighter fire, as if his spirit still rose above the task which had sobered his companions. Michel noted all this in fear and bewilderment; noted the white head yet the vigorous bearing of the man who had struck the light; noted even the manner in which the light died away in the dim recesses of the barn.

"And this Girondin—is he in hiding here?" the tall man asked.

"That is so," Michel answered. "But I had nothing to do with hiding him, citizen. It was my wife hid him in the straw there."

"And you gave notice of his presence to the authorities?" the stranger continued, raising his hand to repress some movement among his followers.

"Certainly, or you would not be here," replied Michel, better satisfied with himself.

The answer struck him, prostrated him, with an awful terror. "That does not follow," the tall man rejoined coolly, "for we, we, also, are Girondins!"

"You are? You?"

"Without doubt," the other answered, with majestic simplicity; "or there are no such persons. This is Pétion of Paris, and this citizen Buzot. Have you heard of Louvet? There he stands. For me, I am Barbaroux."

Michel's tongue remained glued to the roof of his mouth. He could not utter a word. But another could. On the far side of the barrier a rustling was heard, and while all turned to look—but with what different feelings—the pale face of the youth over whom Michel had bent in the afternoon appeared above the partition. A smile of joyful recognition effaced for the time the lines of exhaustion. The young man, clinging for support to the planks, uttered a cry of thankfulness. "It is you! It is really you! You are safe!" he exclaimed. Love beamed in his eyes.

"We are safe, all of us, Pierre," Barbaroux answered. "And now"—he turned to Michel Tellier with thunder in his voice—"know that this man whom you would have betrayed is our guide, whom we lost last night. Speak, then, in your defence, if you can. Say what you have to say why justice should not be done upon you, miserable caitiff, who would have sold a man's life, as you would sell a sheep's, for a few pieces of silver!"

The wretched peasant's knees trembled under him; the perspiration stood upon his brow. He heard the voice as the voice of a judge or an executi ner. He looked in the stern eyes of the Girondins, and read only anger, doom, vengeance. Then he caught in the silence the sound of his wife weeping, for at Pierre's appearance she had broken into wild sobbing; and on that he spoke out of the base instincts of his heart. "He was her lover," he muttered. "I swear it, citizens."

"He lies!" the man at the barrier cried, his face transfigured with rage. "I loved her once, it is true, but it was before her old father sold her to this Judas. For what he would have you believe now, my friends, it is false. I, too, swear it."

A murmur of execration broke from the group of Girondins. Barbaroux repressed it by a gesture. "What do you say of this man?" he asked, turning to them, his tone deep and solemn.

"He is not fit to live!" they answered with one voice.

The poor coward screamed as he heard the words, and, flinging himself on the ground, he embraced Barbaroux's knees in a paroxysm of terror. But the judge did not look at him. Barbaroux turned, instead, to Pierre Bounat. "What do you say of him?" he asked.

"He is not fit to live," the young man answered solemnly, his breath coming quick and fast.

"And you?" Barbaroux continued, turning and looking with eyes of fire at the wife. And his voice was still more solemn.

A moment before she had ceased to weep, and had stood up listening and gazing, awe and wonder in her face. Barbaroux had to repeat his question before she answered. Then she said, "He is not fit to die."

There was silence for a moment, broken only by the entreaties, the prayers, of the wretch on the floor. At last Barbaroux spoke. "She has said rightly," he pronounced. "He shall live. They have put us out of the law and set a price on our heads; but we will keep the law. He shall live. Yet, hark you," the great orator continued, in tones which Michel never forgot, "if a whisper escape you as to our presence here, or as to our names, or if you wrong your wife from this time forth by word or deed, the life she has saved shall pay for it.

"Remember!" he added, shaking Michel to and fro with a finger, "the arm of Barbaroux of

Marseilles is long, and though I be a hundred leagues away, I shall know and I shall punish. So, beware! Now rise, and live!"

The miserable man cowered back to the wall, frightened to the core of his heart. The Girondins conferred a while in whispers, two of their number assisting Pierre to cross the barrier. Suddenly on their talk there broke—and Michel trembled anew as he heard it—a loud knocking at the door. All started and stood listening and waiting. A voice cried: "Open! open! in the name of the law!"

"We have lingered too long," Barbaroux muttered. "I should have thought of this. It is the Mayor of Carhaix come to apprehend our friend."

Again the Girondins conferred together. At last, seeming to arrive at a conclusion, they ranged themselves on either side of the door, and one of their number opened it. A short, stout man, girt with a tricolour sash, and wearing a huge sword, entered with an air of authority. Blinded by the gush of light he saw, at his first entrance, nothing out of the common; he was followed by four men armed with muskets.

Their appearance produced an extraordinary effect on Michel Tellier. As they crossed the threshold one by one, the peasant leaned forward, his face flushed, his eyes gleaming; and he counted them. They were only five. And the others were twelve. He fell back, and from that moment his belief in the Girondins' power was clinched.

"In the name of the law!" the mayor panted. He was a little out of breath. "Why did you not——" Then he stopped abruptly, his mouth remaining open. He found himself surrounded by a group of grim, silent mutes, with arms in their hands; and in a twinkling it flashed into his mind that these were the eleven chiefs of the Girondins, whom he had been warned to keep watch for, and to take. He had come to catch a pigeon and had caught a crow. He turned pale and his eyes dropped. "Who are—who are these gentlemen?" he stammered, in a tone suddenly and ludicrously fallen.

"Some volunteers of Quimper, returning home," replied Barbaroux, with ironical smoothness.

"You have your papers, citizens?" the mayor asked, mechanically; and he took a step backwards towards the door, and looked over his shoulder.

"Here they are!" said Pétion rudely, thrusting a packet into his hands. "They are in order."

The mayor took them, and longing only to see the outside of the door, pretended to look through them, his little heart going pit-a-pat within him. "They seem to be in order," he assented, feebly. "I need not trouble you further, citizens. I came here under a misapprehension, I find, and I wish you a good journey."

He knew, as he backed out, that he was cutting a poor figure. And he would fain have made a

more dignified retreat. But before these men, fugitives and outlaws as they were, he felt, though he was Mayor of Carhaix, almost as small a man as did Michel Tellier. These were the men of the Revolution, nay, they were the Revolution. They had bearded Capet, they had shattered the régime of centuries, they had pulled down kings. There was Barbaroux, who had grappled with Marat; and Pétion, the Mayor of the Bastille. The little Mayor of Carhaix knew greatness when he saw it. He turned tail, and hurried back to his fireside, his body-guard not a whit behind him in their desire to be gone.

Five minutes later the men he feared and envied came out also, and went their way, passing in single file into the darkness which brooded over the great monolith; beginning, brave hearts, another of the few stages which still lay between them and the guillotine. Then in the cottage there remained only Michel and Jeanne. She sat by the dying embers, silent, and lost in thought. He leaned against the wall, his eyes roving ceaselessly, but always when his gaze met hers it fell. Barbaroux had conquered him. It was not until Jeanne had risen to close the door, and he was alone, that he wrung his hands, and muttered: "Five crowns! Five crowns gone and wasted!"

THE END

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